No. 262 / DECEMBER 1994

THE NI NEW INTERNATIONALIST

Winds of change

The United Nations at 50

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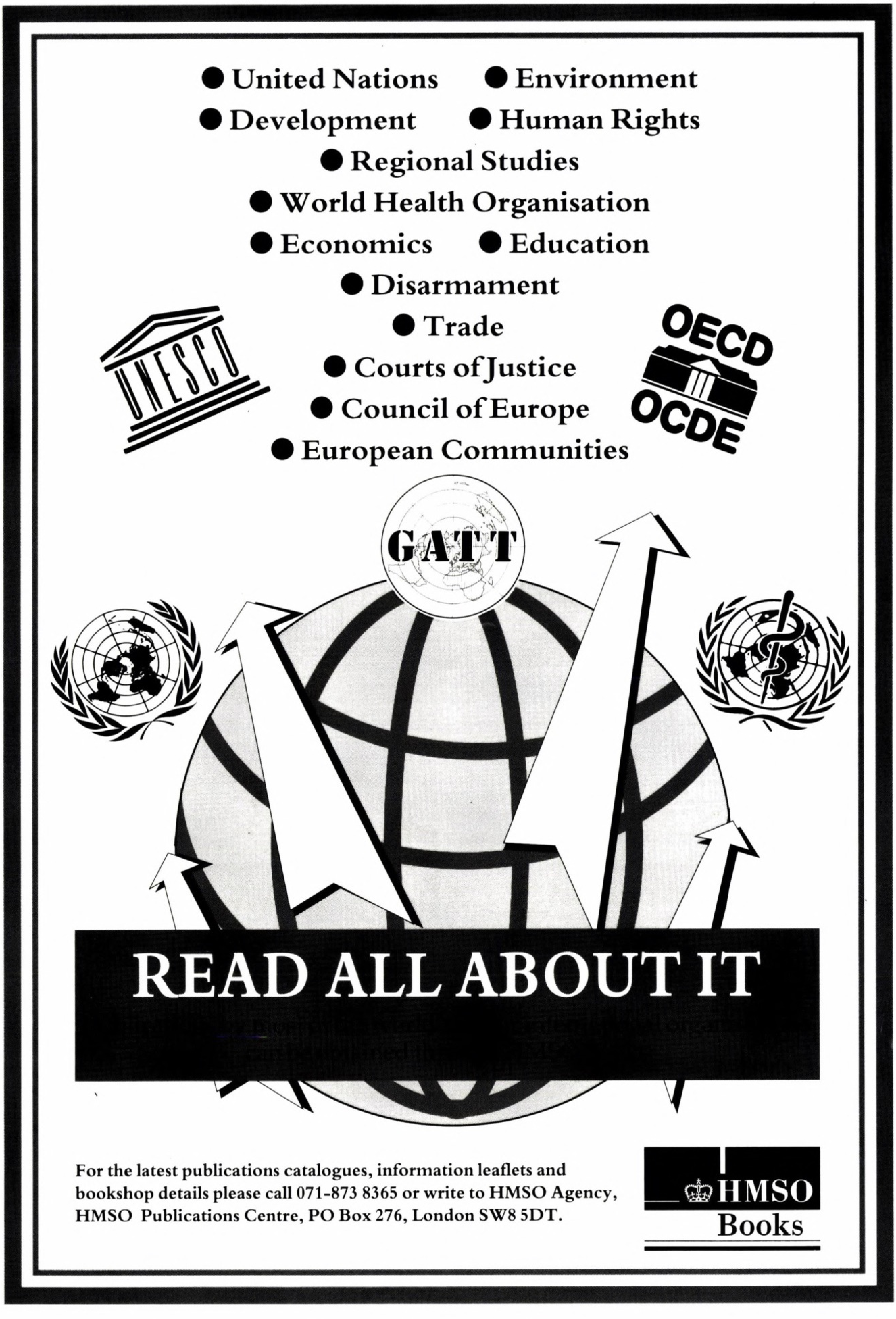

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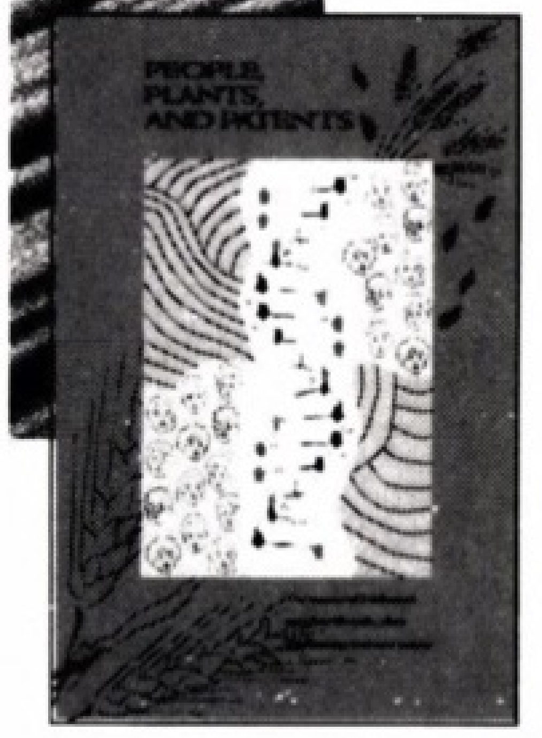

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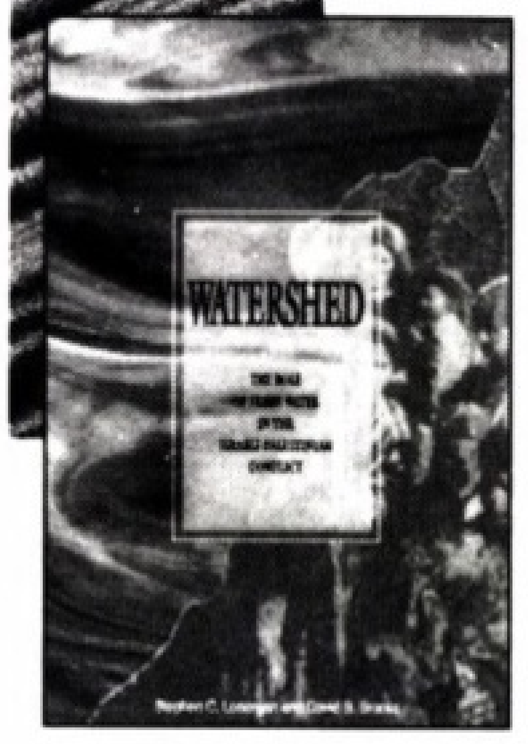

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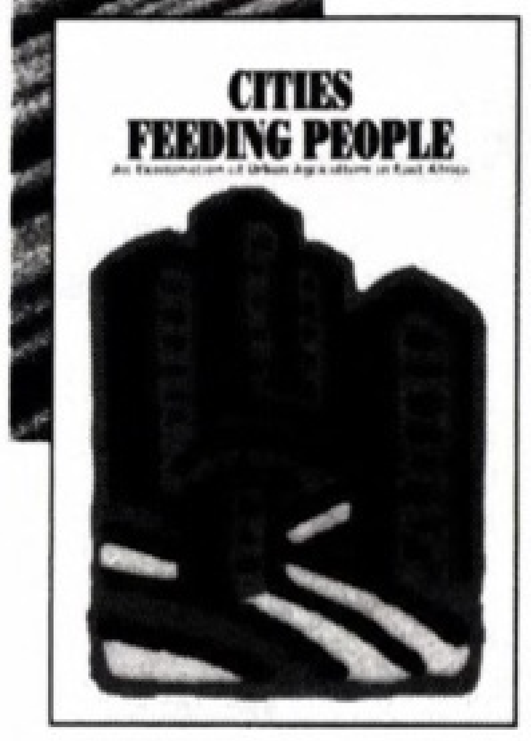
An examination of urban agriculture in East Africa



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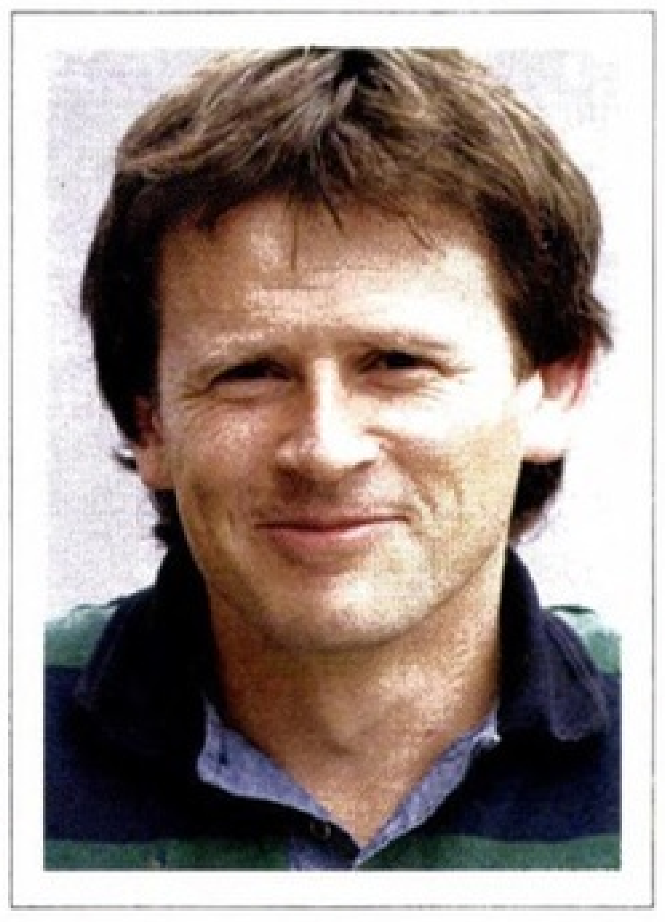
FRONT COVER PHOTO: A SCENE DURING **UN**-SPONSORED ELECTIONS IN CAMBODIA, 1993, BY **TIM PAGE/ REPORTAGE.**
MAGAZINE DESIGNED BY **JIM TURNER.**

THIS MONTH'S **THEME**

United Nations

FROM THIS MONTH'S **EDITOR**

When the hour changes in the English autumn and darkness falls before we leave work we know our Annual Editorial Meeting is looming. At this event the whole Co-operative – as opposed to just the editors – tries to step back from the hurly-burly of producing a monthly magazine and think about the long-term direction we are taking and the quality of the work we are producing. **NI** people fly in to Oxford from our offices in Toronto, Adelaide and Christchurch to take part. Meetings in past years have decided, for example, that the magazine needed a design uplift, or that one of the regular features (we call them 'outside sections' here to distinguish them from the central part devoted to one theme) was getting tired and needed to be replaced. Sometimes we commission an independent journalist whom we respect to come in and assess our performance over the previous 12 issues; on other occasions we have the results of a readers' survey to chew over.



That's just the first day. The second day is devoted to choosing the magazine topics for the following year from the hundred or so suggestions which will be on the table. Each editor will have their own pet topics that they want to work on – but these may well be shot down while a suggestion from our accountant or from outside the Co-operative might sail through with ease. After all the passionate pleading – not to mention the odd bit of tactical manoeuvring – we used to end up choosing exactly 12. Nowadays we are a bit more flexible, choosing a pool of 18 from which the editors can distill the line-up for the year.

The idea of an issue on the United Nations has often been discussed but this is the first time we have ever treated the subject. That's perhaps surprising given how closely the concerns of the UN overlap with our own. Maybe we have been to some extent self-censoring – holding back our criticism on the grounds that the UN is already too easy a target for snipers from right-wing quarters. But we knew we had to produce this issue now or never – 1995 is the UN's fiftieth anniversary and you will be doubtless be swamped with celebratory material of varying quality as the Northern summer approaches. We thought we'd get in before the deluge.

Whenever I use the words 'autumn' or 'summer' an alarm bell sounds in my mind to alert me that our readers in Australasia and South Africa experience the seasons at opposite ends of the year to us in Britain. This magazine regularly criticizes such Eurocentric cultural bias in others so we cannot afford to offend in the same way. But talk of Eurocentrism gives me licence to mention an extraordinary fact which I simply have to include somewhere in this magazine – and though this is designed to be the first thing you read, it is the last thing I write. The UN General Assembly still only sits between September and the last date on which delegates could leave by steamship and get home to Europe in time for Christmas. If ever one detail suggested a need for reform that must be it. There – I've got it in. And now I can go home happy.

Chris Brazier

Chris Brazier
for the New Internationalist Co-operative

The **New Internationalist** welcomes your letters. But please keep them short. They may be edited for purposes of space or clarity. Include a home telephone number if possible and send your letters to the nearest editorial office. The address is inside the front cover.

New South Africa?

Although your issue on *Race* (**NI 260**) confirms that the 14-per-cent white South African minority still owns nearly 90 per cent of the land, it fails to mention that the country remains based on the unique historical fraud of apartheid which pretends that its land ratio of 35 times more for a white than a black is somehow valid. Ferial Haffajee, in her otherwise interesting article, also omits the fact that apartheid's rip-off of blacks has put at least $71 billion in white pockets, with no sign of fair reparation for 'non-whites'.

NI
NEW INTERNATIONALIST
RACE
Unlocking prejudice

Yes, things are changing in South Africa, but the changes are still confined to relationships on a heavily-listing raft in dangerous seas, while the raft itself continues its massive list towards the over-privileged whites, to their great delight. Hardly a firm foundation for a 'non-racial democracy'!

Len Clarke,
Uxbridge, UK

Generation X

I am part of a group of people that is so often dismissively labelled 'Generation X' and I object to the way that articles such a 'Rebel without a clue' (**NI 259**) regard young people as being angst-ridden, alienated and apathetic. To assume that every person between the age of 15 and 30 (as Stephen Hill defines 'Generation X') feels this way is extremely derogatory.

The article was also insulting to Kurt Cobain and Nirvana. Apparently it was assumed that Cobain was a messiah for his young fans and that he let them down by not rebelling against the 'establishment'. Why should this have been so? There was no reason for him to have been 'in rebellion against a corporate structure that's prepared to auction his generation off on the trading block'. He was merely a musician, with his strength lying in his honesty and originality, not his political correctness.

Steven Hill may have been trying to influence 'Generation X', but he has certainly failed to make a favourable impression on me.

Lorna Medhurst
Lanzarote, Canary Islands

Bedevilled

It was with more than usual interest that I picked up the August issue (*Beirut* **NI 258**), having left Lebanon after three years in 1984. Sadly, amidst much valuable information and analysis I still seemed to come across some of the facile generalizations and prejudices which bedevilled outside perceptions from the start.

There is no clear attempt, for example, to explain the tremendously diverse communities. Lebanon's numerous Christian communities have very diverse political allegiances; Christians as well as Muslims fled Phalangist areas in the early years of the conflict, and Christians of several denominations were active – or even predominant – in many areas of progressive politics. Also ignored is the collusion at times of both the Shi'a and the Sunni Muslim élites with the most brutal and reactionary Christian politicians at various stages during the war.

The continuing streams and pockets of confessional coexistence were remarkable features of the war – mainly west of the Green Line, but also in the east. Whatever peace is now being built is to a large degree the work of those who swam for years against the tides, and despite their sufferings would not give in to irrational hatreds.

Mark Deasey
Northcote, Victoria, Australia

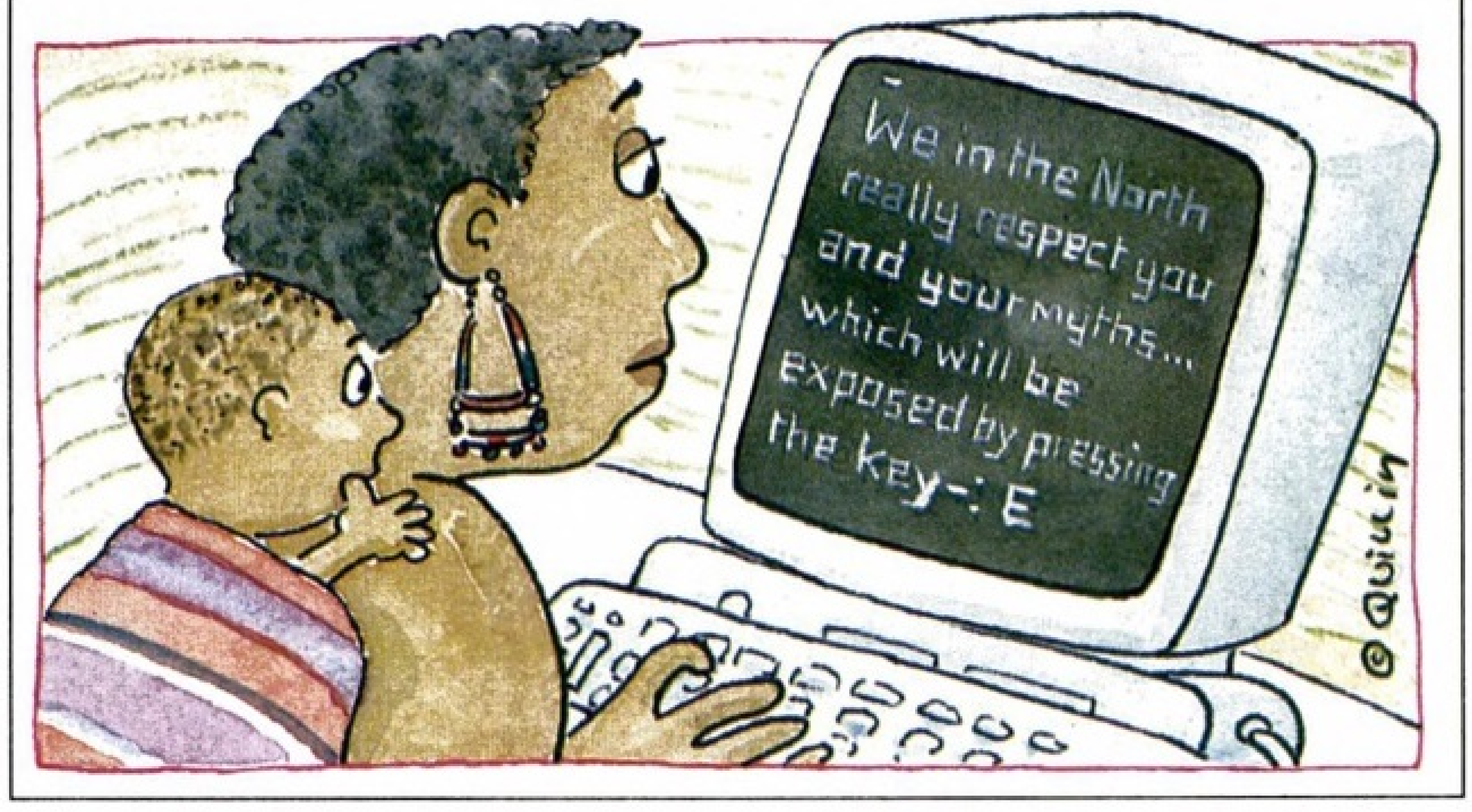
Get real

According to Gio Frank (*Letters* **NI 259**) the 'self-educating, respect-exercising and myth-exposing' Internet could 'allow the laying of a solid foundation for a better world'. Really?

On his own admission, it currently connects 'only 0.36 per cent of the world's population'. That's less than one half of one per cent - and most of them are in North America.

Get real, Gio Frank. The Internet is just another Northern-controlled media institution - only the means of disseminating the information has changed. Until and unless the North starts giving away modems and PCs to the South, the Internet will be nothing more than a lot of rich boys playing with their shiny toys.

Joseph Nicholas
London, UK


We in the North really respect you and your myths... which will be exposed by pressing the key-: E
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VIV QUILLIN

Whitewash

It is perhaps appropriate after the June issue *(Spiked* **NI 257**) to remind readers of the Ethiopian media whitewash, including **NI**'s coverage of the Horn of Africa in December 1992 (**NI 238**).

The number of imprisonments, disappearances and killings performed by soldiers of the Transitional Government is greater than at any time this century. The 20-25 million Oromo are being targeted for human-rights abuses and cultural suppression as never before.

US support – to the tune of 150 million dollars this year – is vital to the survival of the Transitional Government, which has become a one-party, one-race dictatorship. This support was supposed to be conditional on progress on human-rights reform and democratization. US establishment sources claim progress in democratization and play down human-rights abuses.

Will the US Government continue to support and profit from the Transitional Government when the ongoing civil war reaches proportions the media can no longer ignore?

Trevor Trueman
Oromo Support Group, Malvern, UK

Travesti

In your issue on *Prostitution* (**NI 252**) you refer to Brazilian 'transvestites'. That is the sole mention of our sisters. It is wrong. Our Hispanic sisters are known as *travesti*, for the good reason that they choose that designation themselves. *Travesti* is also the term used in Turkey, Greece and throughout continental and Eastern Europe. It is a term for those between the genders – not Western fetish-seeking transvestites or those seeking full surgery or gay men, but a conglomerate of all. The improper use of the term 'transvestite' is an important factor in the manipulations by governments and others in authority.

The advance of industry and Western Christian ideals does nothing to help. Indeed, it increases the danger and helplessness of our situation tenfold. Anything that we, the transgendered, hold sacred, love or respect, has been either taken from us or destroyed, made a mockery of and minimized. Something *has* to be done about this. We need all the help we can get.

Phaedra Kelly
Isle of Wight, UK

No game

As a regular reader of **NI** I know it to be very concerned about the unjust and grossly uneven distribution of wealth in the world. It seems to me that the world can be likened to a great game of monopoly in which the winners gain everything and the losers drop out – or die out, as this is no game.

The IMF and the World Bank are celebrating their fiftieth birthdays. Readers might like to know that Christian Aid has launched a major campaign entitled 'Who runs the world?', to inform people of the disastrous effect of IMF policies on Third World countries and to expose the arrogance of these two powerful organizations who receive our money but who are accountable to no-one. Anyone interested should contact Christian Aid, PO Box 100, London SE1 7RT.

Joyce Tyler
Devon, UK

Ed: Other contacts on this issue can be found in **NI 257** on the World Bank/IMF.

Abuse of justice

I am editing a book which is to be published next year on the abuse of justice by public authorities, politicians and the professions.

I would be interested in hearing from any of your readers about recent cases where they have been directly involved and a significant amount of tangible evidence exists that a clear injustice has been done. Write to me at CAMC Publications, 1 Ickleton Road, Wantage, Oxford OX12 9JA.

Robin Chater
Wantage, UK

Readers might like to know that **Viv Quillin**, our *Letters'* page cartoonist has just produced *Pussyfooting: Essential Dance Procedures for Cats* (Victor Gollancz 1994).

The views expressed on the letters page are not necessarily those of the NI.

Letter from Lagos

A gust of pure evil

Servants who are witches; sorcerers in the office – **Elizabeth Obadina** reveals a new tendency to blame all ills on the supernatural...

IT's the Sunday evening prayer fellowship at a neighbour's house. Against a background of sympathetic murmuring from a dozen or more shocked matrons and young evangelists Auntie Vee is testifying how a commonplace enquiry over a plot of land turned into a trip to the fringes of the spirit world.

'I just wasn't sure about the plot Mama Olu was offering me,' began Auntie Vee. 'Mama Olu said she would swear on a bible that there was nothing wrong.' So Auntie Vee took Mama Olu to a reputable reverend gentleman nearby. Both ladies were attended by their housegirls.

The reverend gentleman greeted Auntie Vee and Mama Olu but found himself unable to pass by Kudirat, Auntie Vee's 10-year-old housegirl. 'This is serious. Come with me,' he said. The two ladies and Kudirat trailed after him.

They emerged two hours later. The land issue had been forgotten, overwhelmed by far greater concern about Kudirat. The reverend gentleman had been hit by a gust of pure evil when he first walked past her. Close questioning and prayer revealed her to be a witch and just coming into her powers. Kudirat's induction had taken place sometime during her last visit home. Her grandmother had been the one to introduce her to the coven which met, as covens usually do, at night, under the broad fronds of the plantain groves. Auntie Vee had attributed Kudirat's lean and troubled looks since returning home to poor feeding whilst away. Now she knew better. Every night, whilst Auntie Vee's household slept in Lagos, Kudirat had been flying off to meet and play with her coven brothers and sisters under the plantains one hundred kilometres away in her home city, Ibadan.

Deeply distressed, Auntie Vee decided that Kudirat would have to go. Kudirat wept and wailed. She didn't want to leave Auntie Vee who had been more of a mother to her than her own mother. She was strong-willed. She could disobey her mates in the coven. She hadn't done a fraction of the evil deeds she had been told to do. The recitation of these turned Auntie Vee's blood cold. Friends and neighbours who had assembled to hear Kudirat's confession and help Auntie Vee with the crisis were agreed that she must leave. The trouble was that no-one was brave enough to take her home. But witch or not, no-one was going to put a child on a bus to travel the hundred kilometres alone.

A week passed. Kudirat spent every night sleeping at the foot of Auntie Vee's bed with CNN blaring out its world news loudly through the dark hours to drown out the phantoms of her coven mates who crowded the walls calling to her. Only with Auntie Vee did she feel safe. When power cuts silenced CNN Auntie Vee would beseech Jesus's protection. At the end of the week they were both worn out from keeping the witches at bay. Kudirat decided to confess the source of her power. It was a charm that was hidden in her family's house in Ibadan.

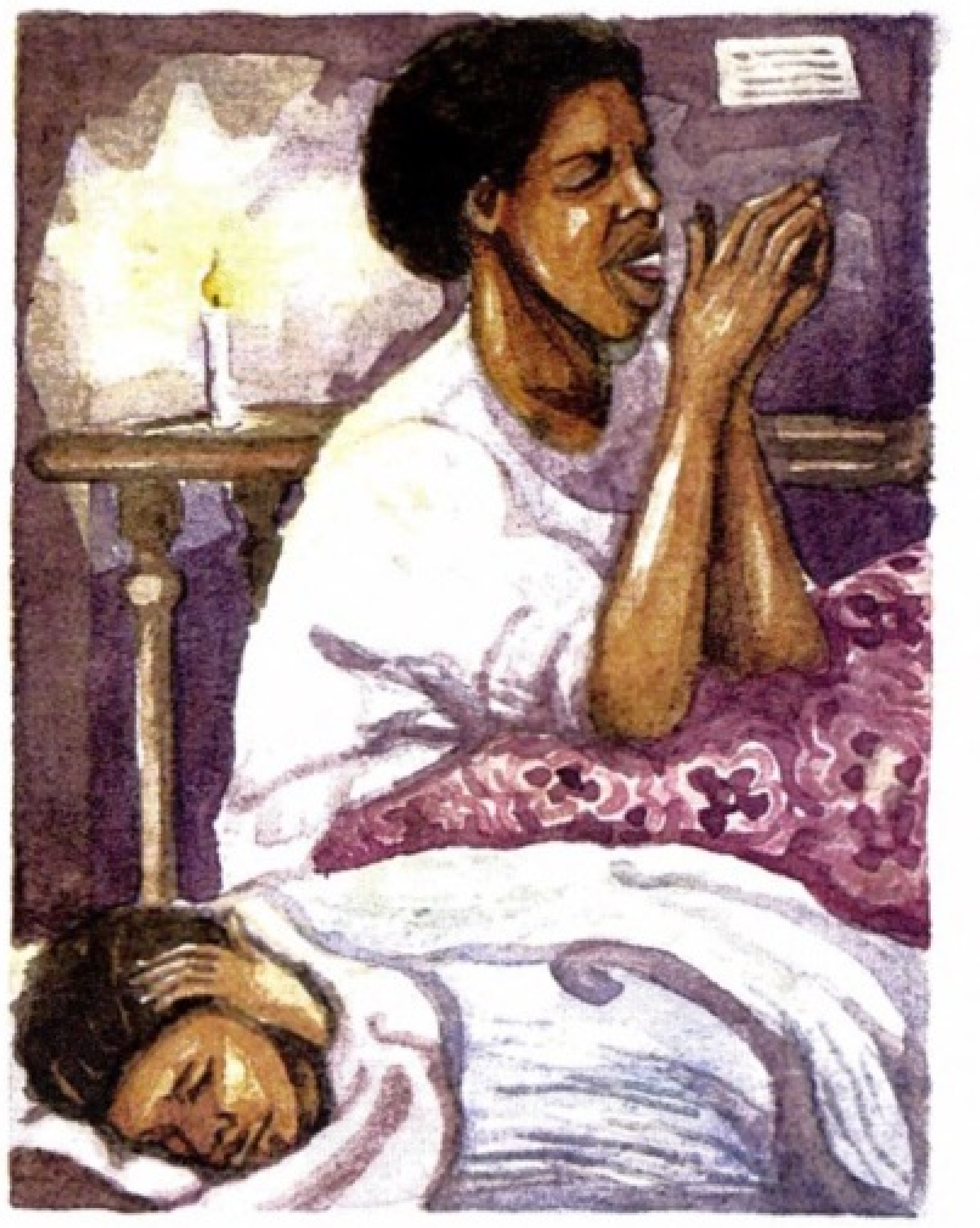


ILLUSTRATION: MIRIAM McCURDY

In the end, Auntie Vee took Kudirat home. Her 'power' was discovered and despite being a Muslim she began a 40-day fast at a church which specializes in the exorcism of witches.

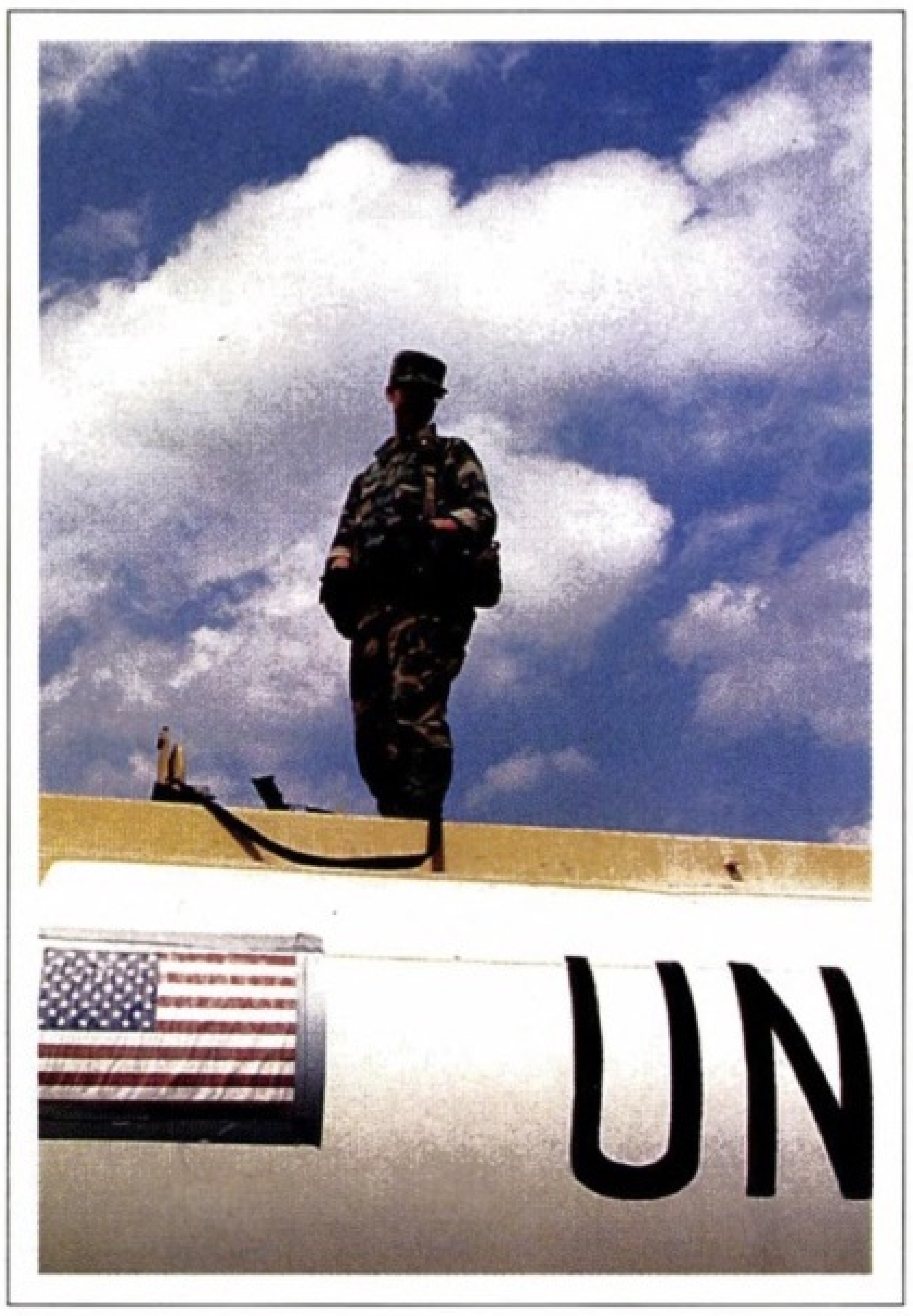
Friends assure me that more and more children are becoming witches nowadays. With the economy and education lying in ruins and individual lives and aspirations destroyed, increasing numbers of people are asking themselves questions. Not: 'Why is this happening and what is the political solution?' but 'Who would wish this evil upon me?' Ask the question 'who?' and individuals immediately come to mind.

A good friend, a senior executive in one of the most corrupt parastatal corporations, has been trying to clean up operations at work. He returned from his annual leave to find loyal staffers begging him not to enter his office. His immediate subordinate had employed the services of a powerful sorcerer, a *babalowa*, to cast evil charms about his office. My friend, a devout Christian, had no fear of them. He believed himself protected by the far greater power of Jesus Christ and reprimanded his staff for allowing their minds to be chained to the superstitious past when the twenty-first century is almost here.

'You can't protect yourself against poison, Liz,' advised my mother-in-law when I told her about Auntie Vee and my friend. 'That's why it's good not to let the children eat outside. You don't know what evil they might swallow. But Jesus protects against all witches. Why do you think the churches are so full nowadays? Only God can save us now in Nigeria.' ■

Elizabeth Obadina is a freelance writer and journalist living in Lagos.

Winds of Change



NOEL QUIDO / FRANK SPOONER PICTURES

Can the UN change enough to win renewed credibility and respect? Or will it be blown away?
Chris Brazier *investigates.*

HIGH up in the UN building in New York you get a fine view of Manhattan's skyscrapers one way and a rather less spectacular outlook over the East River into Brooklyn the other. But the offices themselves are really rather ordinary – bland décor, standardized office equipment, ubiquitous computers. Not much sign here of the lavish bureaucratic excess attacked by conservative critics. The sense of being in a special place does not come here on the upper floors or even in the General Assembly hall which sits idle for eight months of the year. It is in the staff canteen at lunchtime. Here you see at every table a convincing cross-section of the world's people, endlessly diverse in colour and language – a downhome testament to the working reality of the United Nations.

As I sat there listening to the panoply of different accents it threw me back to my teens. While I was still at school and idly considering what my glorious future career might be, the pinnacle of my aspirations was a job with the UN. I suspect I was not alone in those ambitions. Back in the 1960s and 1970s the UN commanded respect and faith as an embodiment of international concern. Whatever its problems during the Cold War, there was always the idea that the world's well-being was being looked after by an institution that would one day, when we were all adult enough to accept that nationalism was a thing of the past, become a world government.

I doubt that many teenagers would share these aspirations now. Public disillusion with the UN is growing as fast as cynicism about Western politicians. Why? After all, we're now five years into the post-Cold War period when the UN gained a new freedom of action, liberated from the tiresome game of superpower veto pingpong.

In a way what went wrong was that the Cold War ended at all. As long as that continued, its ice covered the cracks in the institution erected by a war-weary world on 26 June 1945.[1] As long as Washington and Moscow eyeballed it out over the Security Council table we could dream – if only the UN was liberated from this straitjacket! And we could concentrate on the positive achievements – the eradication of smallpox by the World Health Organization or the immunization of children worldwide by UNICEF.

But then the Soviet bloc imploded. Our

PAUL LOWE / NETWORK

Friend or foe? The star-spangled UN at work in Somalia (above) and Zaire (left). US domination compromises the United Nations more and more.

hopes soared for both a peace dividend and a UN with a new lease of life. The **NI**'s last issue on *The Arms Trade* detailed how the peace dividend has been wasted. And much of this issue shows how inadequately the UN has used its new freedom of manoeuvre over the last five years.

The Gulf War was the start. This was represented as a great triumph – a despot's invasion of a defenceless little country was rolled back by the sheer collective will of the international community. But the military campaign was so transparently a US action – mainly US soldiers, commanded by US generals, using state-of-the-art US hardware – that it severely damaged the credibility of the United Nations as an independent force. Smaller states were whipped into line. Egypt went along meekly and had its debts to the US cancelled; Yemen stood out against and lost its US aid.

But at least the UN operation in the Gulf was successful in its own terms – it expelled the invading forces from Kuwait and blitzed Iraq back into 'a pre-industrial age'.[2] The UN's performance as an international peacekeeper since then has been shockingly inept, as this magazine's articles on Somalia and Rwanda make clear.

Are we expecting too much? Whenever a crisis crops up now in the world our first instinct is to call for the UN. Yet we find fault with whatever action they take. The same people who advocated armed intervention to defend the Bosnian Muslims will deplore the intervention in Somalia. The same people who opposed all-out war on Saddam Hussein will call for all-out war on the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

Blaming the parent

In a way we want to blame the parent. Parents are routinely blamed for all the problems of their children – 'They fuck you up, your Mum and Dad' is probably the poet Philip Larkin's most quoted line. Doubtless because I am a parent it seems rather too easy a let-out. The UN may suffer from the same syndrome. When trouble flares up we can satisfy our desperation that something should be done by calling for the UN to deal with it. And when things inevitably go wrong we can pour scorn on it – for not intervening quickly or early enough, or for riding roughshod over local political and cultural conditions.

Even so, the UN's independence is severely compromised by its subservience to Washington DC. What is the major factor which determines whether or with what vigour the UN launches a peacekeeping operation? The principle? The appalling nature of the problem? Neither. It is the mood of the US. If the White House decides for its own reasons to wade into Somalia – because President Bush wants to give a humanitarian gloss to his term of office – then that is what the UN will do. If the US decides it doesn't want to get involved in Bosnia – 'we have no strategic interest in the Balkans', said the State Department's Lawrence Eagleburger – then the UN ends up wringing its hands over 'ethnic cleansing'. If Washington is licking its wounds after the fiasco in Somalia then some of the worst massacres in recent history can be more or less ignored in Rwanda.

Unfortunately US influence over the world body is harder and harder for the South to challenge. Back in the late 1960s and 1970s the UN was seen as a forum in which the newly independent developing nations might win meaningful changes in the world order. They could not compete in global trade, in wealth or in military firepower. Yet here at least they could be heard. There was genuine hope that through the UN the South could successfully challenge the existing world order.

Those days are long gone. It is shocking to realize now how much those hopes depended on the support of the Soviet Union. For all its faults, Moscow was prepared to champion the cause of the Third World – not least because it was scoring points off Washington and Western capitalism. The Soviet bloc's collapse left developing countries bereft. The non-aligned movement, once a focus for creative ideas if not for global muscle, is now more or less non-existent. In a bipolar world there was the space between to be non-aligned; in today's unipolar world everyone is sucked towards the magnetic centre of power. Countries that once demanded things as their moral right now go cap in hand to the global financiers.

Everyone is cutting a deal

One insightful UN employee from the South lamented this trend. It was a sad picture he painted for me, in which China's defence of its own independent view of human rights (send in the tanks and lock up the students) was welcomed by Southern governments of all political colours simply because it showed a developing country standing up to the West for a change.

'For the most part,' he said, 'there is no real notion of a Third World with a collective agenda any more – everyone is simply trying to cut a deal with the US and the West... I am committed to the UN,' he continued, 'without it there would be chaos out there. But what I want from it is not what the major powers want. They don't want the UN to address social and economic development. All they want is a UN that keeps the lid on – and they only really want that in regions where they have a direct strategic interest.'

This Western lack of interest in the UN's promotion of development is increasingly evident. Michel Camdessus, who heads the IMF, went so far as to say in 1992 that the UN was just one of the four pillars of the world system. He relegated it to social affairs while the other three pillars – his own organization, the World Bank and the new World Trade Organization (the successor to GATT) – handled the serious economic business. The idiocy of seeing social affairs as separable from economic forces apparently did not strike him. Neither did the arrogance of setting his own unaccountable fiefdom on a par with the United Nations.

Yet you can almost understand his arrogance when you see with what compliance the UN has tossed its responsibility for economic affairs into his lap. So now when the UN wants to talk about issues like the widening gap between rich and poor in the run-up to the vital World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen in March, the US and its key allies will say that any debate about economic issues 'will be best handled by the appropriate institutions' – meaning the IMF and the World Bank.

Ah, 'the appropriate institutions' – what a weasel term. The idea of the UN becoming a global government now seems absurd. Yet in one way it has already come about as the IMF and the World Bank have ranged the world cowing national governments into submission. Both these institutions are part of the UN system, though they have become a law unto themselves – not least in their own pay and perks, which far exceed those of their UN counterparts (see table below). But theirs is the efficiency of the tunnel-visioned accountant, aware of the bottom line but not caring about the hardship their 'adjustment' programmes cause. Still less are they capable of standing back far enough to see that their policies – a decade now in the testing – have failed even on their own terms.

THE DRIFTER

WORKING FOR THE UN

There it was. I missed it again. It happens time and again. I'm sitting in a mega-significant international meeting doing my darnedest to concentrate on these weighty matters and I drift off into the ether, missing the key exchange or sentence. I guess in any job you tune in and out of meetings. But it hasn't happened to me so much since I was in eighth grade and being humiliated by my drone of a math teacher for the risible quality of my extra-curricular drawings. Take a look at this room, though: bland, functional, stultifyingly dull – it's as if it's been designed to make you wish you were elsewhere. In my more paranoid moments I could see it as a conspiracy to ensure that the powers-that-be get an easy ride. These meetings are a bit like a game of baseball or cricket where you spend hours peering into the distance waiting for something to happen and then are distracted by a passing seagull – only to find that you've missed the one moment when the ball was hit out of the park.

(Based on the words of a former employee in New York)

Shadow of the flag. The elections in Cambodia were claimed as a UN success story but worries remain that the Khmer Rouge used them to gain ground.

PATRICK AVENTURIER / FRANK SPOONER PICTURES

In the light of all this should we tear down the UN? The traditional defence against this has been the worthwhile work done by the diverse UN agencies. Some of their achievements, notably in health, have been spectacular. But the development work is no longer sufficient defence since, as our survey on Page 12 shows, as many agencies are performing badly as are doing well. And three decades of 'development' have done nothing to combat the core problem of global inequality. In 1960 the richest fifth of the world's population earned 30 times the income of the poorest fifth; today it earns 60 times more.[3]

Yet ironically the worst aspect of the UN's record provides the main reason for trying to retain and reform it. If it were abolished tomorrow it is probable that the best agencies, like UNICEF, could retain an independent existence. But it is absolutely certain that the World Bank and the IMF would gain even more unchallenged sway. And if the UN were to be demolished there would be not a hope in hell of a new organization rising phoenix-like from the ashes to challenge them. The will and idealism to create a new institution has only ever existed after a major cataclysm – as the First World War spawned the League of Nations and the Second World War the UN. And while we may lament the fact that the UN's rhetoric too seldom translates into action, even the limited

The power and the vainglory. A mural by Norwegian artist Per Krohg oversees the deliberations of Boris Yeltsin, John Major and George Bush in the Security Council.

NOVOVITCH / LIAISON

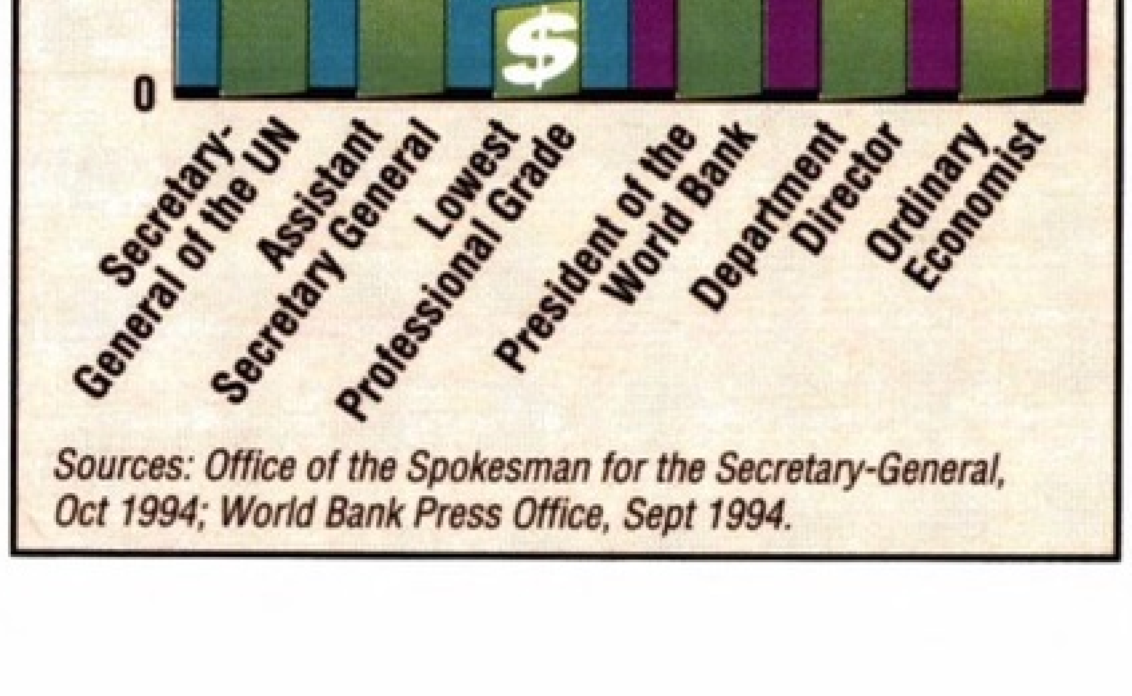
prick to conscience that rhetoric and peer-group pressure provide may be preferable to no acknowledgement of responsibility for the poor at all.

Crying out for reform

It is, then, worth at least trying to reform the UN. The natural first impulse is to make it more democratically accountable. Despite the opening to the Charter which reads 'We the peoples of the United Nations...' (significantly echoing the constitution of the United States), the peoples are notable by their absence. Yet this would not be easy to correct.

We could demand that delegates to the General Assembly were elected. But the whole point of the UN is that governments should implement the policies collectively arrived at there – and taking the General Assembly out of their hands would make this much less likely. The more urgent need is to reform the existing institution so that it functions with more efficiency and independence. Since the US is forever screaming about how much money it has to pay into the UN system (even though it has to be cajoled and crawled to for the dues to be paid, usually a year or 18 months in arrears), its contribution should be reduced from 25 per cent of the regular budget to nearer 10 per cent. Other wealthy countries should share the burden more evenly. This would automatically slacken the American stranglehold somewhat.

The game on Page 24 suggests how difficult it will be to reform the archaic power structure of the Security Council. The preeminence there of the Second World War's victors – the US, Britain, France, Russia and China – with their veto over changes in the UN Charter as well as everyday policies, is an absurdity. They are unlikely to give up their privileged position – particularly the ex-colonial powers of Britain and France who cling on to their places at the top table like children desperate to stay up late with the grown-ups. But by clinging on by their fingertips they are putting the whole existence of the UN in danger. A new Security Council which had as many permanent members from the South as from the North – ideally with no-one holding a veto – would do much to transform the world's sense of the UN.



Sources: Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General, Oct 1994; World Bank Press Office, Sept 1994.

Choosing a leader

At the very least the UN must be transparently accountable. The permanent members also control the appointment of the Secretary-General and their method of selection is about as open and systematic as King Henry VIII's appointment of advisers. Did the current incumbent, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, formally apply for the job? Was he interviewed? Was an exhaustive trawl done of the most able candidates? No. Boutros-Ghali was appointed the same way all his predecessors were, after a secret process of horse-trading between the veto-holding powers to find the least offensive candidate. It is hardly a system designed to provide the organization with an energetic, visionary leader. That is no coincidence since the major powers decided nearly 25 years ago that they much preferred someone who would not rock the boat.

The appointment of the Secretary-General – and of all the directors of UN agencies, whose recruitment is just as much of a lottery – must be taken out of the hands of the major powers. The General Assembly should instead launch an accountable recruitment process. Perhaps if this were so the Assembly would be sensible enough to choose a first female Secretary-General. Sadako Ogata, the current High Commissioner for Refugees, has been tipped as a possibility – she has already regenerated one moribund agency, after all. What is more she is prepared to tread on toes to support what is right. She is making Boutros-Ghali squeal at the moment, publicizing a report from Rwanda which claims there are organized killings of Hutus by the new government's army; he wants the report suppressed because it makes the UN's peacekeeping forces in the country look bad.

The first test of whether the UN can regenerate itself as a force for global change will come soon. At the vital Social Summit in March the UN must recognize that its vision of human development is being fatally undermined by the policies of its own institutions. The fiftieth anniversary year would be a suitable moment to create an Economic Security Council – and to begin the process of bringing the IMF and the World Bank to heel.

The UN edifice cannot be insulated from the winds of change for much longer. If it is not prepared to take on a new role, more representative of the needs of that vast majority of the world's population which lives in the South, then it must prepare to be blown away in a cloud of dust and dreams. ■

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1 The 50 representatives at the founding Conference signed the UN Charter on 26 June. The UN's anniversary is, however, celebrated on 24 October, by which time the Charter had been ratified by a majority of signatories. **2** A quote from Under-Secretary-General Martti Ahtisaari, who visited Iraq in April 1991. **3** Erskine Childers, in *London Review of Books*, 18 August 1994.

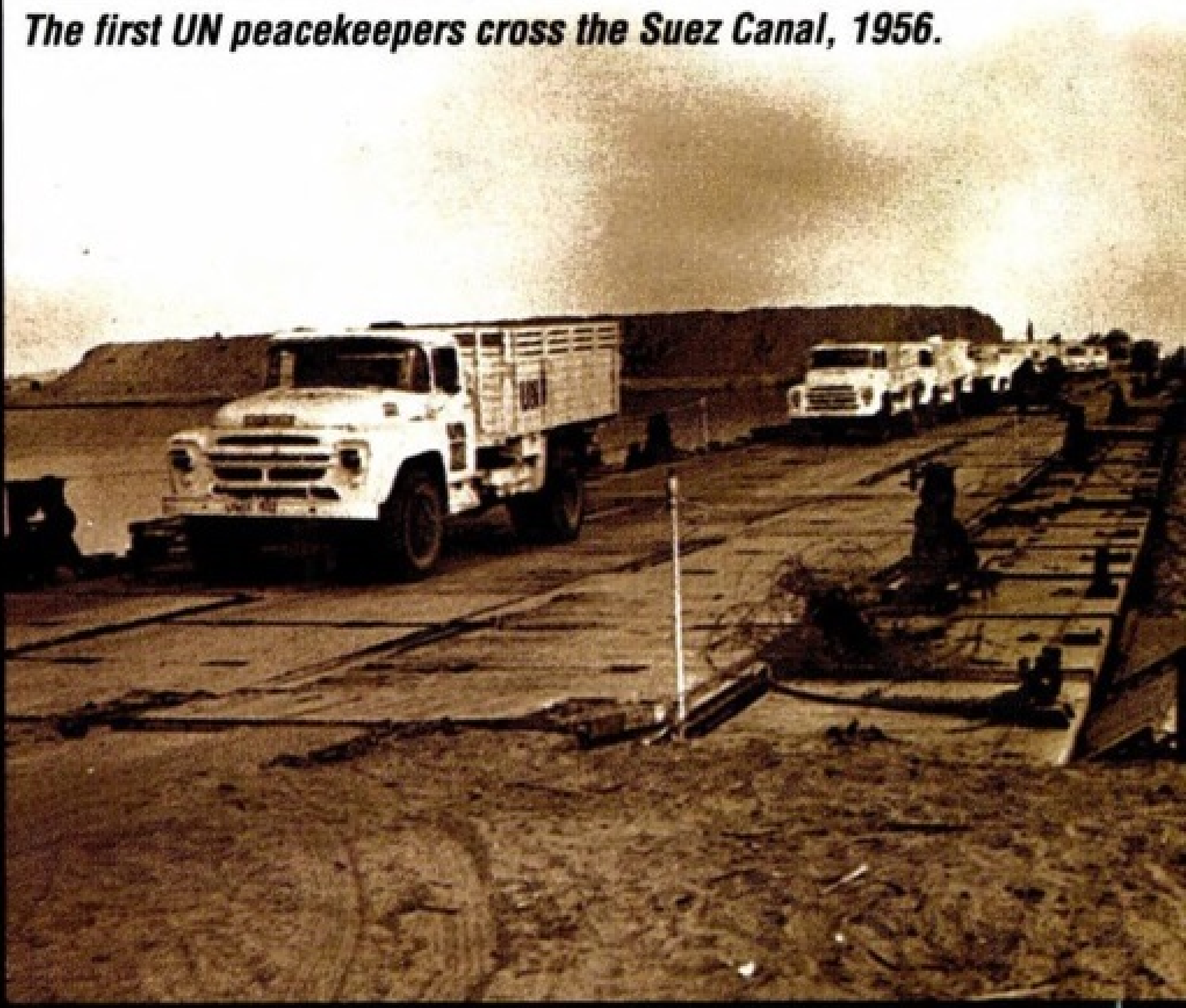
HEROES AND VILLAINS

THE UN IS ONLY AS EFFECTIVE AS GOVERNMENTS OF THE DAY ALLOW IT TO BE. BUT IT STILL NEEDS GOOD LEADERSHIP. HERE THE **NI** LOOKS BACK ON THE SIX SECRETARIES-GENERAL, FROM THE VISIONARY TO THE SHEEP, THE CAMPAIGNER TO THE CROOK.

Berlin in 1945.

TRYGVE LIE *(Norway)* 1946-52

The first Secretary-General was by far the most outspoken. His strength reflected the high hopes for the new organization in the aftermath of a devastating war. But Lie's readiness to wade in with his own opinions on any and every world issue had mixed results. In supporting (in vain) Communist China's right to take its seat at the UN after the 1949 Revolution he was admirably clear-sighted and prepared to stand up to the US. But ultimately his passionate advocacy of the US/UN position in the Korean War won him the enmity of the Soviet Union, which refused to take part in UN activities when he was present, forcing him to resign.


The first UN peacekeepers cross the Suez Canal, 1956.

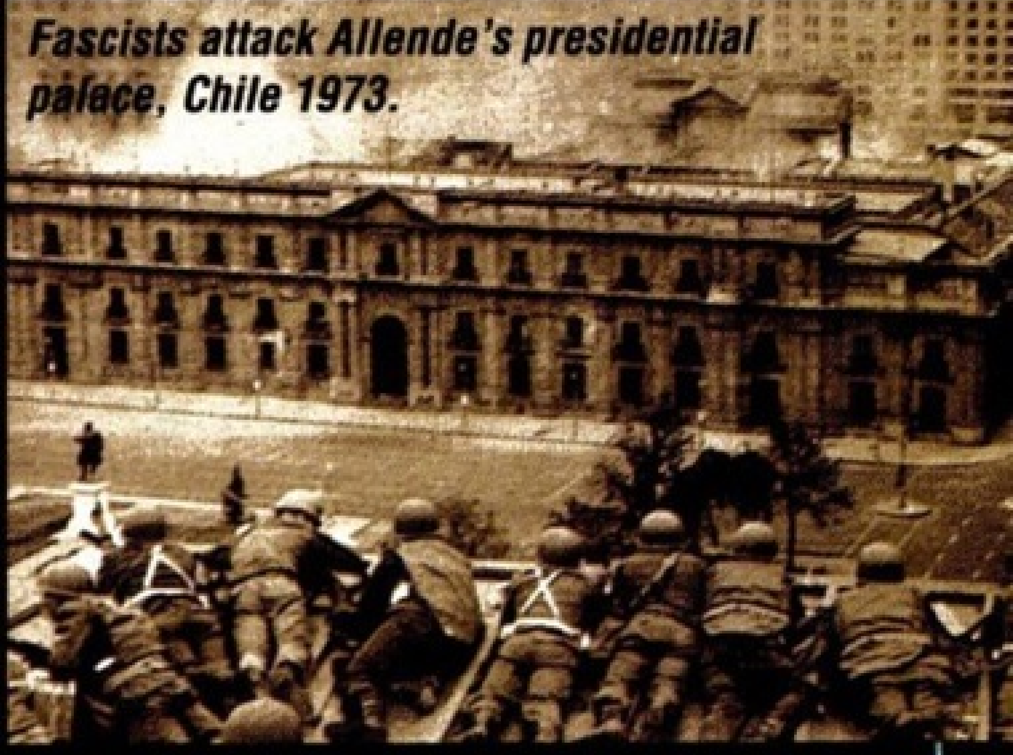
DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD *(Sweden)* 1953-61

Hammarskjöld was the UN's finest leader. More carefully diplomatic than Lie, he was just as prepared to take independent initiatives and not simply serve the major powers. He behaved with credit during the Suez Crisis when Britain and France were clearly at fault. And he was largely responsible for the whole idea of peacekeeping, which is not provided for in the UN Charter. The first UN peacekeeping force was deployed in Egypt in 1956. The perils of peacekeeping were soon evident during his intervention in the civil war following the Belgian Congo's independence in 1960. The UN soon found itself 'taking sides' and imposing 'peace' through military force. The intervention also cost Hammarskjöld his life – he died in a suspicious plane crash in Northern Rhodesia while on his way to meet secessionist rebels. His Congo policy incurred the wrath of the Soviet Union. Hammarskjöld's idealistic response was that he was there to serve the interests not of the great powers but of the small states.

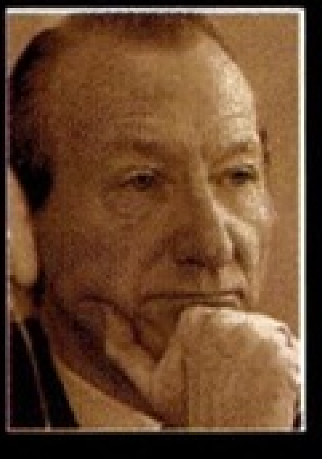
The US-Vietnam War, 1969.

U THANT *(Burma)* 1961-71

The major powers now informally agreed that no future Secretary-General should have the power and presence of Hammarskjöld. U Thant was the first fruit of that change of policy, being quiet and bureaucratically inclined, almost never speaking at Security Council meetings. He presided over 10 further years of Cold War in which the UN was frozen into immobility on the peace-and-security front. But these were also the years in which newly independent developing countries joined the organization in droves, full of hope that they could harness it in the cause of global justice and equality. The presence of a leader from the South symbolized that new phase for the UN, as did U Thant's own most daring initiative – his repeated and passionate criticism of the US war in Vietnam.


Fascists attack Allende's presidential palace, Chile 1973.

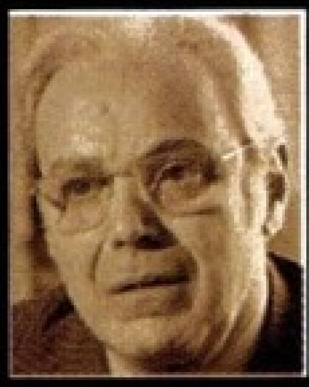
KURT WALDHEIM *(Austria)* 1972-81



Waldheim will be remembered less for his work at the UN than for the accusations of involvement in Nazi war crimes which dogged his later career as President of Austria. He was arguably the least distinguished of all the UN's leaders. Publicly diplomatic, even obsequious to the major powers, in private he was vain, with a violent temper. During his term the UN Secretariat lapsed in standards as the quality of senior staff was continually diluted by backscratching 'political' appointments and hints of corruption – staff morale in New York sank ever lower.

Frankfurt Stock Exchange, 1980s.

JAVIER PÉREZ DE CUÉLLAR *(Peru)* 1982-91



Pérez de Cuéllar, a sensitive, soft-spoken aesthete, was bored stiff by budget discussions, which notoriously sent him to sleep. The perilous financial basis of the UN, forever dependent on an increasingly hostile US, was never likely to be turned around in his term of office. And it may also be no coincidence that during his decade the World Bank and the IMF – UN organizations both – started to set the global economic agenda, effectively undermining the UN's humanitarian development work. Pérez de Cuéllar concentrated instead on the 'good offices' function of the Secretary-General – the power to act as an independent mediator in international disputes – and achieved some success in later years in this role, most notably in El Salvador.

BOUTROS BOUTROS-GHALI *(Egypt)* 1992-

Boutros-Ghali is the most forceful UN leader since Hammarskjöld, as 'hands on' as Pérez de Cuéllar was 'hands off'. Staff in New York have already been shaken up by his reorganizations and he may pay more attention than his predecessors to the nitty-gritty internal reforms which are so badly needed. But he would never have been appointed had he not been considered 'sound' by the Western powers on the key issue of the global free market. His use of the UN's post-Cold War freedom of manoeuvre has been generally disastrous, as in Somalia and Rwanda. He does seem to recognize that the world is going to be ever more war-torn if the basic needs of the poor are not met. If his concern were serious he would lead a campaign to bring the World Bank and the IMF to heel, starting perhaps at the Social Summit in Copenhagen. But don't hold your breath.

Gulf War, 1991.

ALL PHOTOS CAMERA PRESS EXCEPT 'CHILE' – ANON, 'BOUTROS-GHALI' – ALAIN MORVAN / FRANK SPOONER PICTURES

PAUL LOWE / NETWORK

Flashlights over Mogadishu

Damned if it acts, damned if it doesn't – after the event we can all be wise about UN intervention. But ***Mohamed Sahnoun*** *was the man sent in 1991 to assess what kind of intervention the UN should make in Somalia – and who saw his advice ignored as US troops staged their invasion for the world's cameras.*

MY first appeal to Somalis was ironically from Nairobi, Kenya, because I knew that anyone with a small transistor radio tends to turn on at six o'clock to listen to the Somali Service of the BBC. 'I am here on behalf of the United Nations and the international community,' I said. 'I'll try to get as much assistance as I can to fight the famine but you have to find within yourself forces and people who can help rebuild Somalia, can stabilize the country and create peace.'

The reaction was extraordinary. People came from all over to see me, people who were starving or who came out of hiding especially to respond to my message. There were teachers and police officers, professors and community leaders. Many had tears in their eyes saying 'Mr Sahnoun, we want to help, we understand your message'. I was in contact with women's leaders who were ready to create an association. 'All we need,' they said, 'is some way to show we are useful. If you bring in the supplies and ask us to manage them then we can become a real alternative to the warlords.'

I reported this to the UN because it seemed to me to be of the utmost significance: it showed that the warlords were not the solution. I told the Secretary-General's office that while clearly we had to talk to the warlords we had a real alternative in these community leaders. There was a civil society out there just waiting to be empowered if only emergency relief had come in on a large scale and enabled them to start organizing themselves. There was the potential for a bottom-up approach that would provide a real challenge to the warlords.

But this message was not understood in New York by Boutros Boutros-Ghali and his assistants. What they always want is big fixes, spectacular solutions. This time it was no different – they wanted the warlords to meet in Nairobi and have them shake hands for the flashlights. And that is the road the UN chose to go down. By avoiding the grassroots approach it gave power and prestige to the warlords, built up the sense that they were the only people who could resolve the problem. As a result the potential community leaders became dispirited, realizing they had no alternative but to ally themselves with one warlord or another – instead of seeking within themselves for the solutions to Somalia's problems.

I was appointed as the UN's Special Representative in Somalia because I'd spent 10 years in the Horn of Africa as a Deputy Secretary-General of the

S PETERSON / LIAISON

Rally round the flag – an anti-US demonstration in the Somali capital. What was supposed to be a mercy mission turned into an onslaught.

Organization of African Unity (OAU). I knew the Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali then, while he was lecturing at a university in Cairo, and also later while I was Algerian ambassador to Germany, France, the US and the UN.

When I arrived in Somalia in March 1992 it was a shock. We could not even land at the airport in Mogadishu – we had to land on a small strip in the bush to the north. And driving in the landrover we passed many thousands of displaced people who had fled the capital and were now living in the worst conditions imaginable.

The capital itself was deserted – the only people to be seen were carrying guns and even they were starving. The only UN agency at work there was UNICEF, and they were limited to the capital. There were just a few voluntary agencies – notably the International Committee of the Red Cross and Save the Children – doing a fantastic job with virtually no means.

It was then I contacted community leaders and recommended to New York that we needed a massive humanitarian intervention on the scale of Ethiopia in the 1980s and Biafra in the 1960s. The only people, I argued, who were able to discuss or analyze things at the time were the warlords because they were the only ones with full stomachs.

Instead of this massive operation what did we get? A trickle of food. UN agencies remained reluctant even to send representatives to Mogadishu, arguing that the security situation was too bad. At that time, though, it *wasn't* – in the whole seven months I spent in Somalia not a single expatriate was killed. There were people dying of starvation and skirmishes between Somalis but nobody touched the aid workers who went into the bush without protection. Yet the UN agencies preferred to stay in Nairobi or Djibouti and send reports from there. This addiction to security of UN staff is a huge problem in emergencies. It leads me to believe more aid should be channelled directly to voluntary organizations, whose staff are more prepared to take risks.

This was bad enough but we had wasted a whole year already. Let's not forget that Siad Barre had left Mogadishu in January 1991, 14 months before I arrived. All those months Somalia was without government, without administration, without money – it was total chaos. Yet for nine of those months there was no serious fighting. All over Somalia people were waiting for mediation and the fighting between the clans in Mogadishu only started in October 1991. Yet in all this time the UN did not move. When in June 1991 the neighbouring country of Djibouti organized a conference of the different factions and asked the UN for help the response was blunt: 'We are not going to involve ourselves in Somalia; the issue is too complex.'

Procrastination continued even after I'd been dispatched on my mission. By August 1992 I realized that the only way to make things happen was to involve the media. The *New York Times* and *The Guardian* were approached – and they wrote the first articles. After that CNN came and then *60 Minutes* [a flagship US TV documentary] and the snowball was rolling. Once media coverage became overwhelming and people could see on their TV screens what a tragedy it was, donor countries finally began airlifting supplies.

Then all of a sudden, after months of delay and distance, the urgent priority of the UN in New York was to send forces. I knew how sensitive the situation in Somalia was and urged them not to send troops until the conditions for that had been negotiated. The warlords had been against any UN military force from the beginning and even community leaders had been suspicious. But I had persuaded the community leaders that 500 troops were needed to stop looting and banditry at the port and the airport – really a police force rather than an army.

Then in New York, when the 500 soldiers were not even operational, they started making statements about sending 3,000 troops to Somalia. This made the Somalis very nervous – they started asking me what the hell I was up to. 'You told us you were going to send 500; these 500 have not even come and you want to send 3,000 more. Are you plotting to put Somalia under UN trusteeship?'

In the end the UN had 30,000 troops in Somalia. They were completely rejected by the population. It turned into a total mess and at least 6,000 people died in clashes between UN forces and Somalis. Things became so dire that we even talk about a Somalia Syndrome now.

This must never happen again. The UN tends to think the more blue helmets you have the more likely you are to solve the problem. This is absurd. Naturally blue helmets are needed sometimes but we need to create conditions for their deployment. Military intervention should be well timed, the ground should be prepared, the troops should be efficient and should know exactly why they are there. You can't bring in UN troops for humanitarian purposes and then change the mandate – as they did in Somalia when they started pursuing the warlord Aideed. If you do, you have a total mess.

In sensible medicine you look to strengthen the immune system at the same time as you apply a remedy from outside. So within the society of Somalia, Rwanda or the next vulnerable country you must find people who can create conditions for peaceful, political solutions. But we don't do it – we try to have quick fixes again and again.

People talk about UN intervention as if the only intervention possible is military. But we urgently need to intervene at a much earlier point – one that removes the need for blue helmets later. People talk about *stopping* the genocide in Rwanda but we should be looking at how we could have avoided it altogether. It would have been possible. If the UN had used all its powers to enhance the negotiations that took place under the auspices of the OAU in Tanzania; if the UN had really seen to it that there was a proper embargo on arms to Rwanda...

The UN is still not prepared today to have a preventive policy, only to react. The result is that the cost of peacekeeping has jumped tenfold over the last two years while at the same time development assistance to the Third World has decreased from 60 million dollars to 50 million dollars. So at the same time as people talk about building up the UN, they allow it to withdraw from development assistance – and by doing so might be creating the conditions for future Rwandas.

S PETERSON / LIAISON

Guarding a queue for food in Mogadishu. Aid worth 150 million dollars was delivered by a military machine costing two thousand million dollars.

The question is not whether or not the UN should intervene – if there is a humanitarian catastrophe the international community is morally bound to intervene. But that intervention should happen early so that it can succeed at the diplomatic level without recourse to the military.

Diplomacy should always come first – and it should be done with great seriousness. That does not mean sending some UN official with no knowledge of what the problems are, who arrives in his suit and tie, stays one hour, and goes back again. He or she must be prepared to spend as long as is necessary – and to risk his or her life too. It would be best if the envoy were not a UN civil servant but a personality of international stature such as Jimmy Carter – and they should be backed by all kinds of pressure from the international community.

My own recent experience in the Congo confirms my belief that early intervention can work miracles. The fact that you have probably not heard of the crisis in the Congo is evidence in itself – it shows the situation was defused before it reached the world's attention.

In Congo the crisis began last year after the change from a one-party system to a multi-party system. There were elections which the opposition considered unfair; they took up arms and put up barricades all over the capital, Brazzaville, which was their power base. Several hundred people were killed; there were people displaced and others in detention. It began to look like another African tragedy.

The Secretary-General of the OAU then asked me to go as mediator and I spent a couple of weeks shuttling between the two sides. There was no security: I had continually to cross the no-man's land between the Government-controlled parts of the capital and those held by the Opposition. But I kept at it until we had the basis for some kind of agreement. We then took delegates from both sides to Libreville and arrived at an agreement sponsored by the European Union. That sponsorship was important – this is the first time that two regional organizations have co-operated to sponsor negotiations and monitor the resulting agreement.

We left the UN out. I felt it was better to see how two regional organizations could work things out without bringing in the UN and its bureaucracy. As a result Congo had elections early this year and there is now a parliament in which the Opposition is present – in fact the Opposition's leader has been elected Mayor of Brazzaville with government support. They have serious economic problems still to face. But here was an example where early intervention enabled us to avoid a large-scale civil war.

I started with a disaster story and I've ended with a success. Successes like these are perfectly possible if the UN shows the right vision and moral leadership. Unfortunately it is precisely this kind of moral leadership which is now so absent. ■

The peacemaker. Mohamed Sahnoun at work in Somalia in 1991.

M SAHNOUN

Mohamed Sahnoun is currently a Pearson Fellow at the International Development Research Centre in Ottawa. He also acts as a consultant to the Earth Council and to UNESCO.

School's Out

Few people know just how many UN agencies there are - still less whether their work is effective. Here the NI marks the report cards of the most prominent members of the UN class.

FAO REPORT 1945-1994

FULL NAME: UN Food and Agriculture Organization
HOME ADDRESS: Rome
PRINCIPAL: Jacques Diouf (Senegal), Director since 1994
CLASS SIZE: 6,000 employees
ALLOWANCE: $673 million (1994/5)
RECORD: FAO's 50th birthday falls a few days before that of the UN as a whole, next October. The shadow of one man will loom large over the celebrations - Edouard Saouma, whose 18 years as Director recently came to an end. Saouma ruled with the iron fist of a medieval emperor - staff were required to call him 'Your Excellency'. FAO has a worse record than any other agency. It has actually done more harm than good to people and the environment through its uncritical promotion of the Green Revolution, dangerous pesticides and its insistence that small farmers switch to cash crops instead of growing their own food. Saouma's departure must help but FAO seems almost beyond reform.
MARK: 0/10

UNICEF REPORT 1946-1994

FULL NAME: UN Children's Fund
HOME ADDRESS: New York
PRINCIPAL: James Grant (US), Director since 1980
CLASS SIZE: 7,000 employees
ALLOWANCE: Income $888 million, Expenditure $972 million (1994). UNICEF is the only UN agency which receives funds direct from the general public.
RECORD: UNICEF has been the driving force behind the universal child immunization programme, which it claims is now saving the lives of 10,000 children a day. Its World Summit for Children in 1990 produced a treaty which should soon become the first universally ratified human-rights convention in history - and its country offices are energetically monitoring governments' progress in meeting the goals they've signed up for. UNICEF is the most focussed of all the UN agencies - and the most effective. But even its strength as an institution could be endangered by the wrong choice as Director following Jim Grant's imminent retirement (he is now 72).
MARK: 9/10

UNFPA REPORT 1969-1994

FULL NAME: UN Fund for Population Activities
HOME ADDRESS: New York
PRINCIPAL: Nafis Sadik (Pakistan), Director since 1987
CLASS SIZE: 837 employees
ALLOWANCE: Income $219.6 million Expenditure $215.4 million (1993)
RECORD: More and more women are gaining control of their fertility. While less than 10 per cent of couples in developing countries used contraception in the 1960s, 55 per cent did in 1993. But UNFPA is funded and driven by rich countries' paranoia about population growth in the South - it has looked too kindly over the years on repressive regimes like China (with its one-child policy) and Indonesia. It has also had (on its own admission) 'an overwhelming concern for quantitative achievements and... demographic targets' - in other words keeping Third World numbers down. In recent years, though, partly because of its female Director, UNFPA has placed much more emphasis on women's rights, seeing them as people needing education, equality and comprehensive health care rather than just as mothers. The recent Cairo Conference may have had to steer a course between the Vatican and Western feminism but its emphasis on women's choice and reproductive health and choice is a big improvement on simplistic Malthusian number-crunching.
MARK: 5/10

UNDP REPORT 1965-1994

FULL NAME: UN Development Programme

HOME ADDRESS: New York

PRINCIPAL: James Gustave Speth (US), Administrator since 1993

CLASS SIZE: 6,631 employees

ALLOWANCE: $1,426 million (1993)

RECORD: Even people in the development field tend to be hazy as to what UNDP actually does - and some say you could abolish it tomorrow and barely notice the difference. This is because it is a funding and co-ordinating agency with no projects of its own. Its image has been transformed by the success of the Human Development Report. Outspoken for a UN document about the need to change development policies so they meet the needs of the poor, the Report is the more remarkable for having emerged during the term of Bill Draper, a Reaganite whose main passion was for privatization. UNDP's funding policies have barely changed, however - and its criticism of structural adjustment seems hypocritical given its close co-operation with the World Bank. New Administrator Gus Speth claims to be bringing UNDP's funding criteria into line with the human-development principles of the Report - but then he would, wouldn't he? UNDP needs to put its money where its mouth is.

MARK: 3/10

UNHCR REPORT 1951-1994

FULL NAME: UN High Commissioner for Refugees

HOME ADDRESS: Geneva

PRINCIPAL: Sadako Ogata (Japan), High Commissioner since 1991.

CLASS SIZE: 3,444 employees

ALLOWANCE: Hoped-for expenditure in 1994 $1,308 million. Raised by 31 August $889.6 million. UNHCR depends on voluntary contributions from governments, which vary each year.

RECORD: In contrast to WHO, UNHCR has been revitalized by a change at the top. The previous High Commissioners, Messrs Hocke and Stoltenberg, had respectively been ousted due to a financial scandal and resigned after a few months. UNHCR itself was ineffectual and unfocussed. The new chief, Ms Ogata, has transformed the organization. It now responds more quickly and efficiently to refugee crises - which are now coming thicker and faster than ever - and responds to the needs of internally displaced people as well as those who have left their country. She has also raised the agency's profile substantially - not just through public relations but also through taking up vital refugee-related issues.

MARK: 7/10

WHO REPORT 1948-1994

FULL NAME: World Health Organization

HOME ADDRESS: Geneva

PRINCIPAL: Hiroshi Nakajima (Japan), Director since 1988

CLASS SIZE: 5,200 employees

ALLOWANCE: $1,800 million (1994/5)

RECORD: WHO can take credit for one of the UN's greatest achievements – the eradication of smallpox. But it is a classic case of a UN agency which has gone off the rails because of a change of regime. Under its previous Director, Halfdan Mahler, WHO was an effective advocate of primary health care (investing in low-tech care at local level instead of hi-tech hospitals and medicine for an élite). It also campaigned for countries to use a few essential drugs rather than a plethora of expensive brand names - and the agency still contains able people doing good work to fight disease. But Mahler's successor, Nakajima, has more or less ditched the essential drugs policy, influenced by the lobbying of the pharmaceutical industry. He is generally considered to be a disaster and even the major powers were not prepared to support his re-election in 1993. But in a dismal display of vote-buying by Nakajima and his Japanese Government backers that brought the whole UN system into disrepute, he eventually gained re-election.

MARK: 4/10

ILO REPORT 1919-1994

FULL NAME: International Labour Organization

HOME ADDRESS: Geneva

PRINCIPAL: Michel Hansenne (Belgium), Director-General since 1989.

CLASS SIZE: 1,254 employees

ALLOWANCE: $447 million (1994/5)

RECORD: 75 years old this year, ILO is often seen as the agency promoting the interests of workers worldwide. But given that it is responsible to a tripartite board comprising governments, employers' organizations and trade unions, it is never likely to do that. The last time ILO was at the centre of things was in the late 1970s when its World Employment Programme, emerging from a major conference in 1976, threw up all kinds of creative ideas about the basic needs of the poor. Since then it has been marginalized by the dominance of the World Bank and IMF in economic matters and ILO has become an inconsequential backwater of the UN system.

MARK: 2/10

UNEP REPORT 1972-1994

FULL NAME: UN Environment Programme

HOME ADDRESS: Nairobi

PRINCIPAL: Elizabeth Dowdeswell (Canada), Director since 1992.

CLASS SIZE: 913 employees

ALLOWANCE: $112.1 million (1993)

RECORD: UNEP has been one of the weakest agencies in the UN system - the surge in environmental concern worldwide cannot be attributed to its work. Previous Director Mostafa Tolba was notorious for his autocratic, almost monarchical behaviour and it is significant that the two major recent international initiatives on the environment - the Brundtland Commission and the Rio Earth Summit - were organized outside UNEP. Its most concrete achievement has been to secure an agreement that has reduced the pollution of the Mediterranean. New Director Elizabeth Dowdeswell is a technocrat who has failed as yet to raise morale or effectiveness.

MARK: 2/10

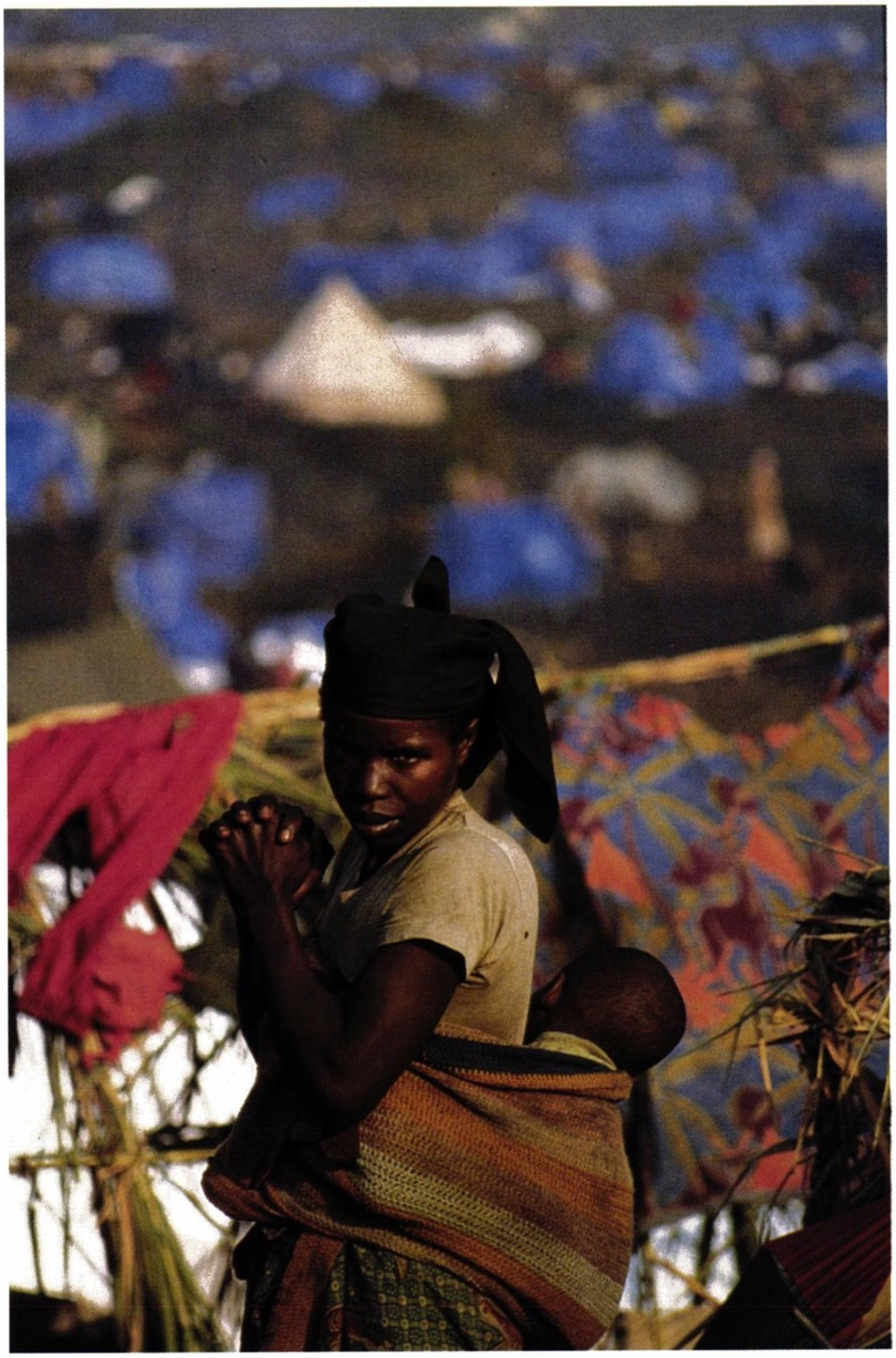
For the World Bank and the IMF (International Monetary Fund) see the recent NI issue (NI 257).

Other UN agencies are: UNESCO (UN Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization); UNCTAD (UN Conference on Trade and Development); GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade); WFP (World Food Programme); DHA (Department of Humanitarian Affairs); UNIDO (UN Industrial Development Organization); IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development); UNITAR (UN Institute for Training & Research); UNRWA (UN Relief & Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East); UNU (UN University); HABITAT (UN Centre for Human Settlements); WFC (World Food Council); UNDCP (UN International Drug Control Programme); ICJ (International Court of Justice); INSTRAW (International Research & Training Institute for the Advancement of Women); UNIDIR (UN Institute for Disarmament Research); UNRISD (UN Research Institutie for Social Development); UNICRI (UN Inter-regional Crime & Justice Research Institute); ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization); UPU (Universal Postal Union); ITU (International Telecommunication Union); WMO (World Meteorological Organization); IMO (International Maritime Organization); WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization); IAEA (International Atomic Energy Authority); WTO (World Tourism Organization).

ILLUSTRATION: PHIL DOBSON

What on earth were they doing?

Lindsey Hilsum saw Rwanda explode into one of the worst massacres of the century – and watched the UN's response.


JENNY MATTHEWS / NETWORK

A sea of blue, far, far from the sea. The tent city of Rwandan refugees across the border in Goma, Zaire.

It was Thursday 7 April 1994 and in Kigali the killing was under way. Shooting and shelling reverberated around the town – the war between the Government and the rebels had started up again. But most of the residents of Kigali feared gunfire less than other sounds: chanting, whistling, screaming. Bands of militia – youths from Rwanda's majority Hutu ethnic group, armed with machetes and clubs studded with nails – were moving unimpeded through the suburbs of the city.

Minority Tutsi people and opponents of the Government, the killers' targets, fled to the homes of foreigners and into churches in a vain and desperate attempt to hide. Some were killed with hand grenades, others were dragged out and shot. Thousands of mutilated bodies were tossed into the streets and piled up in gardens.

Monica, the wife of a Tutsi who worked for a UN agency, rang me gasping and sobbing with terror. The militia had broken into her house. 'They said they would kill me. I went on my knees and said "let me pray first". They spared me when I gave them money but they said they'd be back tomorrow. Help me, please.'

No-one went to rescue Monica or the other families of UN workers targeted by the killers. Only foreigners were evacuated from Kigali. Monica found her own way out of the capital. Her two children, who had been staying with a relative upcountry, were killed.

Units of the 2,500-strong United Nations force in Rwanda, known as UNAMIR, tried to patrol the streets of the capital in their distinctive white UN vehicles, but they failed to breach the roadblocks and stop the killing.

'The gendarmes are preventing us from crossing into certain parts of town. Those may be the areas where there are most casualties,' said the UNAMIR spokesperson, Mokhtar Gueye. He was right.

The UN troops did not use force to get past the roadblocks. They did not take on the killers because their mandate did not permit it. Their mandate was to keep the peace but there was no longer any peace to keep. Civilians – including Rwandans working for the UN – were being slaughtered in thousands by government-backed militia and the Army. The UN Force Commander, General Romeo Dallaire of Canada, called his political bosses in New York wanting more weapons and the authority to try to stop the killing. The UN Security Council duly voted not to augment the force but to scale it down. As the killing intensified, UN troops scrambled onto planes to leave Kigali.

Survivors of the massacres, many of whom lost their entire families, are bitter. Jean-Paul Biramvu, a human-rights activist who escaped the killing, said: 'We wonder what on earth UNAMIR was doing in Rwanda. They could not lift a finger to intervene and prevent the death of tens of thousands of innocent people who were

MIKE GOLDWATER / NETWORK, S.PETERSON / LIAISON (INSET)

Key players in a deadly game. A Rwandan Patriotic Front leader comes to Kigali to negotiate under UN auspices. Inset is Canadian UN force commander General Romeo Dallaire.

being killed under their very noses.'

UN troops went to Rwanda in November 1993. Their mandate was to keep the peace between forces of the Hutu government and rebels of the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) which had launched a civil war in 1990. A peace accord had been signed in August 1993 and the UN force was supposed to monitor the peace, help the two sides disarm and oversee a transition to a power-sharing transitional government. The theory was perfect but – maybe predictably – nothing went according to plan.

Far from disarming, both sides carried on giving weapons to their civilian supporters. The Rwandan President, Juvenal Habyarimana, dragged his feet over the formation of the transitional government. An attempted coup in neighbouring Burundi raised the tension. As the months went on the relative calm of the country crumbled: politicians were assassinated, grenades were thrown into bars and nightclubs, shooting was heard every night.

The UN force had no authority to impose law and order, just to supervise. It was supposed to assist the Rwandan Government's security forces, but even before April it was the security forces who were responsible for much of the violence.

Meanwhile the UN soldiers were trying to understand what each other was saying. Twenty nations were represented from Ukraine to Uruguay. They had no common language and had not been trained together. The largest contingent came from Bangladesh but they were waiting for their equipment, which never arrived. During a brief flurry of killing in February, the Bangladeshi medical corps rushed anxiously up to visiting journalists begging for gauze and pain-killing drugs – they had no supplies themselves.

Everyone could see how weak the UN soldiers were and no-one feared or respected them. If disaster were to strike, the force was manifestly unable to cope. When the plane carrying President Habyarimana and his Burundian counterpart, President Ntaryamira, was shot down, Kigali exploded and 10 Belgian soldiers trying to protect the Prime Minister were murdered by members of Rwanda's Presidential Guard.

THE CARTOONIST

WORKING FOR THE UN

NEVER in the years that I worked as the **NI's** cartoonist did I dream that one day I would actually be an aid worker, scrubbing dirt instead of ink from under my fingernails. Certainly I never dreamed that one day I would work in such devastated cities as Goma in Zaire and Mogadishu. While in Mogadishu I continued to do cartoons. But when I arrived in Goma I felt unable even to broach what I encountered, as though putting the misery and death into a cartoon would automatically trivialize it. Being an aid worker is dangerous these days – more UNICEF staff members have been killed on the job in the last 3 years than in the first 46. But do I regret giving up a career as a cartoonist? No. Ironically it was the journalists who were perhaps more traumatized by what they saw in Goma than the aid workers. At least it was our job to do something about it.

(By **Christian Clark**, once the **NI**'s monthly cartoonist, now working with UNICEF in East Africa)

The Security Council, afraid of being dragged into another lengthy and vicious war in Africa, voted to pull out all but 400 UN soldiers. Instead of trying to stop the massacres, the UN concentrated on trying to arrange a ceasefire between the Army and the RPF. This was a hopeless task – the RPF were by then rapidly gaining ground so were not going to agree to a truce. Moreover, if the UN had any interest in saving the lives of civilians, it was addressing the wrong problem – the people were not being killed in the war, but by government forces in government-held territory.

The UN's military failure was caused by inept political leadership and organizational weaknesses. No-one could have predicted exactly what would happen, but there is evidence that the massacres were planned well in advance. Yet the UN envoy, Cameroonian politician Jacques Roger Booh Booh, gave no hint that he was aware of the premeditated nature of the killings. On the contrary, he continued to recognize the authority of the Rwandan Government as it committed genocide.

The small UN force left in Kigali did the best it could. The African UN troops drove around town under fire and argued their way through roadblocks to rescue some civilians. They painstakingly negotiated 'population swaps' so Tutsis and opposition politicians could go to areas controlled by the RPF and Hutus to the government-held suburbs. They saved lives – but despite not because of the decisions made by their bosses in New York.

By May Rwanda had become an embarrassment, a symbol of international indifference. This was one of the worst massacres of the century and the UN Security Council had been seen to be doing nothing about it. The Council voted to send troops back to Rwanda but the US – still reluctant to get involved because of fear of the 'Somalia Syndrome' – delayed releasing the resources. African countries which had agreed to provide soldiers could not do so because they had no equipment. According to a senior UN official, the US offered armoured personnel carriers (APCs) but then said it would take five weeks to prepare them and another five weeks to train soldiers to use them. When the APCs finally arrived in neighbouring Uganda they had neither communications systems nor machine guns.

As the UN floundered, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said there was nothing more he could do. 'Unfortunately I failed; it is a scandal. I am the first one to say it and I am ready to repeat it,' he said at the end of May.

By mid-June, half a million Rwandans had been killed. The UN had done nothing to stop the slaughter, so France acted in its place. But as a supporter of the Hutu regime its troops could never have been seen as a neutral force – and known killers did escape to Zaire.

NOEL QUIDO / FRANK SPOONER PICTURES

My country is bleeding. A Rwandan refugee in Goma, Zaire.

In July the RPF took over Rwanda and formed a new government and in August a UN force finally arrived. Once more the UN's job is to keep the peace. This time the troops do have the authority to use their weapons to protect civilians if necessary.

But the UN now has no credibility in Rwanda. Hutus distrust the UN soldiers because they did not prevent the RPF from taking power. Tutsis distrust them because they failed to stop the killing. A promised investigation into genocide and human-rights abuses is faltering – by mid-October there should have been 130 UN human-rights monitors in Rwanda, but there were only about 40, they had no transport.

It will be debated for years whether anyone could have prevented the horror of Rwanda. The killers had a well-planned programme to exterminate the Tutsis and the political opposition which would not have been easy to stop. However the UN set itself up to fail.

No important power cared about Rwanda, with the possible exception of France, which had supported the killers. The US and Britain did not want to know. No-one noticed that the peacekeeping force was inadequate, no-one listened to the warning signs in the months leading up to the massacres, no-one knew what to do when the killing started, no-one acted decisively when the scale of the slaughter became clear.

The UN is only as effective as the great powers want it to be. In Rwanda's case, they did not choose to care until it was too late. ■

Lindsey Hilsum is a freelance journalist who specializes in East African affairs.

Caring, cocktails and cartoons

The capital of Bangladesh, Dhaka, might also be called the capital of UN development aid. But what do local people think of the UN's work?
***Meghna Guhathakurta** sounds them out.*

THE children huddled together gleefully under the tin roof, their eyes glued to the video screen – this was a rare treat in the village school. Across the screen capered Mina, a bright-eyed cartoon girl. They all recognized her immediately – and knew what she represented.

A shy and soft-spoken girl of eight confessed: 'I want to get educated like Mina. And then... I want to be a doctor.' A cheery-faced seven-year-old boy with sharp eyes shared his understanding of the cartoon campaign: 'Mina wants to go to school, but they (parents, elders) won't let her.'

Mina is an invention of UNICEF, which has been using her as the cornerstone of a campaign throughout South Asia to demonstrate the value of female education to poverty-ridden parents and a prejudiced society. In a sense Mina is also the most popular face of the United Nations in Bangladesh. At any rate UNICEF, with its much-publicized image as a crusader for maternal and child care, has won many people's hearts and earned respect as a development partner in the truest sense. Almost everyone would recognize another of UNICEF's public-education efforts, the slogan *Baccha Bachaan! Tika Din!* (Save your child! Vaccinate her/him!).

But other clear impressions of the UN are hard to come by. Indeed few people remember that the country owes a permanent debt of gratitude to one of the UN's great unsung success stories – the UNROD relief operation during the first few years of independence in 1971. The new nation had just been through a bitter war. Famine loomed. Yet the Government was not even recognized by many potential donors. The UN proved the ideal conduit for the emergency aid required. About ten million refugees and millions of displaced Bengalis were absorbed back into the country quickly and quietly, law and order was by and large preserved and the threatened mass slaughter of minorities (Urdu-speaking Biharis) was avoided. Above all people were fed.

THE THIEF

WORKING FOR THE UN

I HATE this country – but that's why I'm here. The main reason that people accept a job in a place like this is so they can stash away money – and I'm stashing away a small fortune. Because it's classified as a hardship post, I'm automatically on 25 per cent above the basic salary for my grade. In addition it's a Muslim country, which means we work on Sundays – and that gets me another 25 per cent. My housing's paid, food is cheap and there's really nothing else to spend money on, so I'm building up a nest-egg.

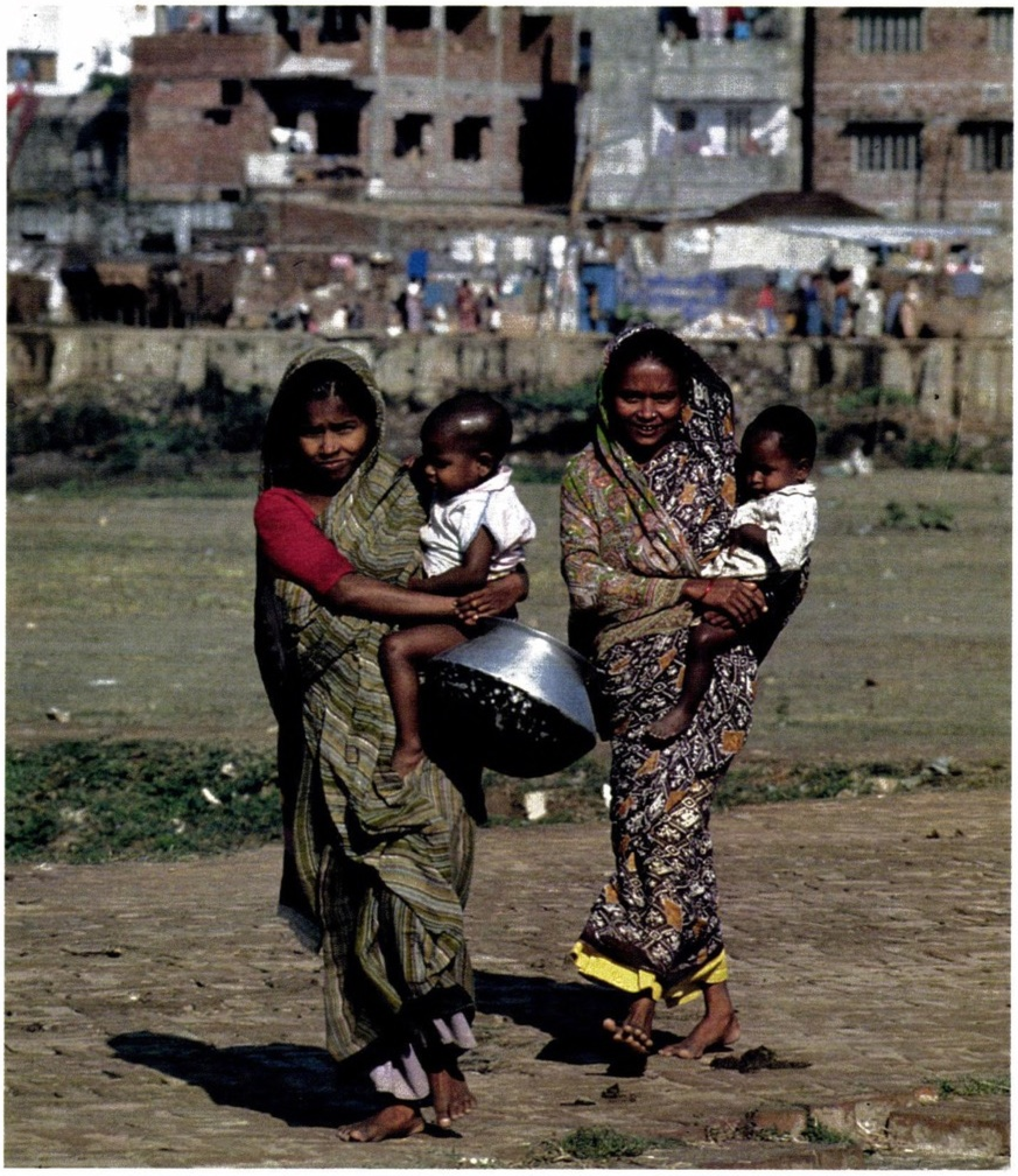
(UN aid worker quoted in *Lords of Poverty* by **Graham Hancock**)

More than two decades have passed since then. It is a pity that such a glorious feat has been forgotten as much at home as abroad. It is forgotten here largely due to the political amnesia systematically cultivated by military regimes which denigrated anything achieved by democratically elected civilian governments. This has played into the hands of Bangladesh's international image as a basket-case where nothing positive ever happens.

Bangladesh certainly relies on foreign aid. On average, foreign assistance accounts for about two-thirds of total investment, 90 per cent of public investments and 55-60 per cent of total imports. Out of the total aid disbursed in 1991, the UN system – including the IMF and the World Bank – accounted for 36.5 per cent.

What worries many local activists is the dependence syndrome which aid creates and which permeates every level of Bangladeshi society. To many, aid has come to mean the easy way out. Rather than mobilizing local people to construct a dirt road, rural officials will wait for access to Food for Work grain. Instead of getting the young to clean up the neighbourhood, people will complain about the lack of municipal services.

Even the best kind of UN aid could be seen as having a negative effect. A young activist from one of the ethnic groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts puts it this way: 'It's true that the UN is doing some good work here, but it is sometimes against the interests of groups like us. We are fighting a war against a military bureaucratic establishment. They are repressing our rights.



JULIO ETCHART / REPORTAGE / STILL PICTURES

Heart of the matter. Poor women in Dhaka are the target of UN health and education schemes – and of fundamentalist concern.

The Government takes counter-insurgency measures in the name of development... like building roads to make our rugged countryside more accessible for army tanks, or developing rubber plantations so there is less wild forest. So even an apparently welfare-oriented project such as raising the living standards of rubber-plantation workers can work against our cause.'

A more typical response would be to welcome UN aid in general but to wish the Government were more choosy about the quality of the aid pouring into the country. As it is, the Administration gives a red-carpet welcome to almost any project proposed by donors. Often the only bone of contention between donor and recipient seems to be what kind of luxury car will provide the most appropriate form of transport.

But the very idea of development is increasingly coming under fire from a very different quarter. Development in Bangladesh has always been the ideology of the establishment, whether military or civilian, and it was anchored firmly in the secular modernizing trends of the West. Recently, however, fundamentalist forces have started to gain ground.

Fundamentalism has been on the rise in Bangladesh ever since the state veered away from the post-independence ideology of socialism and secularism and underwent an Islamicization process. Fundamentalists' attack on development activities in Bangladesh has been two-pronged. Their accusations are that development has largely been funded by 'Christian money' and that development is antithetical to Islamic culture as it draws women out of *purdah* (seclusion). Up to now the physical assaults have been directed at grassroots organizations – burning down schools, preventing access to medicare and the like. But the wider development activities which depend on UN funding are also affected, especially those which relate to women.

All of this highlights UN agencies' confusion over their role. Their job used to be simpler: they concentrated on technical assistance and big infrastructure projects. They still tend to do a lot of that. But lately the incorporation of human development (emphasizing health and education) into their agenda seems to have turned UN agencies into actors in search of a role. It has brought them face to face with problems which they are institutionally not equipped to handle, and has required them to be sensitive to the particular culture and politics of the country.

Aid donors have not hitherto been known for such sensitivity – they have recently been tying aid packages to structural-adjustment reforms, for instance. Donors closely co-ordinate their policies both internationally at an annual forum in Paris and nationally in a group chaired by the World Bank's Chief of Mission. No doubt the donors prefer this arrangement, but what does it really have to say about that buzz phrase 'partnership in development'? The real partnership is no longer between donors and the host country, but between the donors themselves.

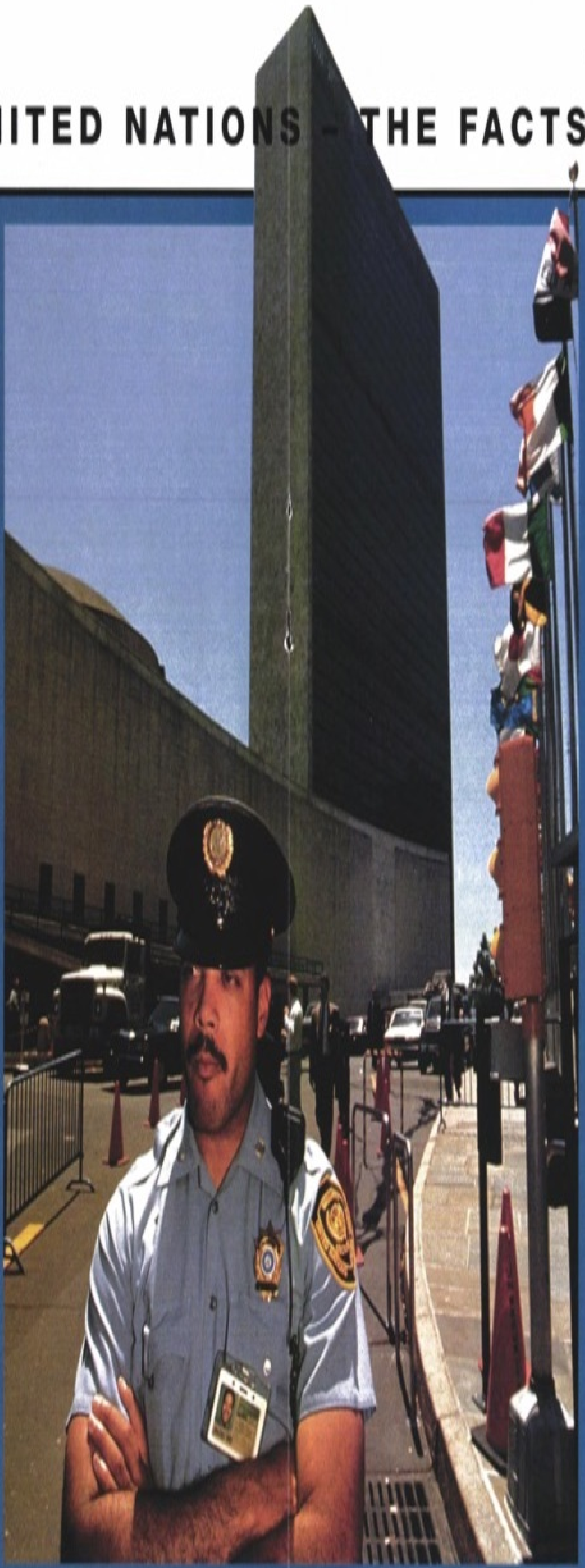
Aid workers in Bangladesh – and UN agency staff not least among them – are often in the enviable position of being the trendsetters in a developing world. They occupy the most exclusive bungalows in uptown Dhaka. They ride impeccable white sedans with chrome yellow licence-plates which flash in the sun and proclaim to the world their difference from ordinary citizens.

What is more, UN jobs lure Bangladeshis as honey lures bees. The rewards are many: the fat pay, the bonuses, the glamour, not to mention the power which comes from holding the purse-strings. Or else they seek seminars abroad or study trips which can give them a taste and feel for the good life. They start pursuing the model of development they see around them – not the hot and clammy project offices in the countryside but the cool, trendy cocktail circuits of uptown Dhaka. When confronted about their lifestyle, aid donors have a ready answer: 'What about the even more lavish lifestyle of the local élite – not to mention the oppressive, almost feudal social system!'

One wonders if it would be more fruitful if they asked instead why, despite two decades of development assistance, Bangladesh has failed to graduate to self-reliance. Or why Bangladesh has been persistently portrayed in the world media as the classic case of hopelessness and despair. Or indeed why the torch of UNROD's success has been passed to an exclusive club of donors with a very peculiar idea of partnership. ■

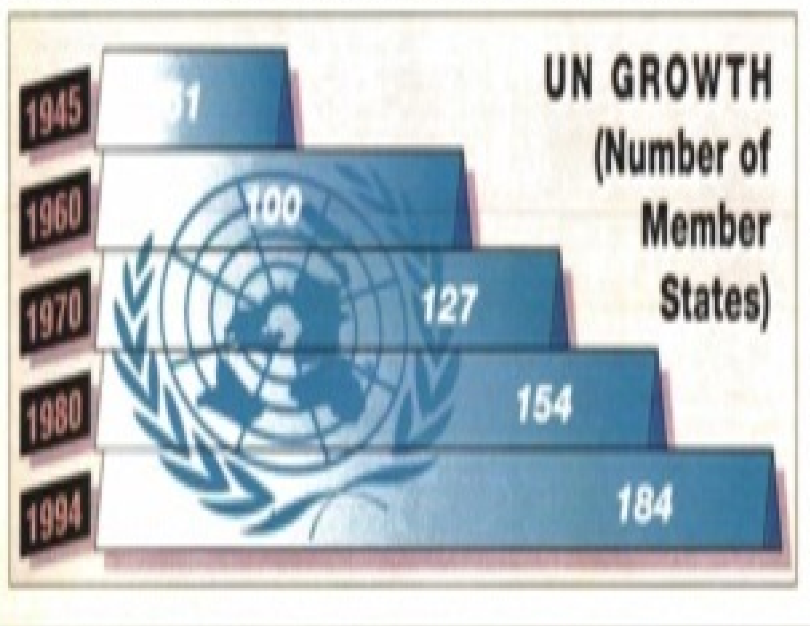
Meghna Guhathakurta is Assistant Professor of International Relations at the University of Dhaka.

UNITED NATIONS – THE FACTS



THE MEMBERS

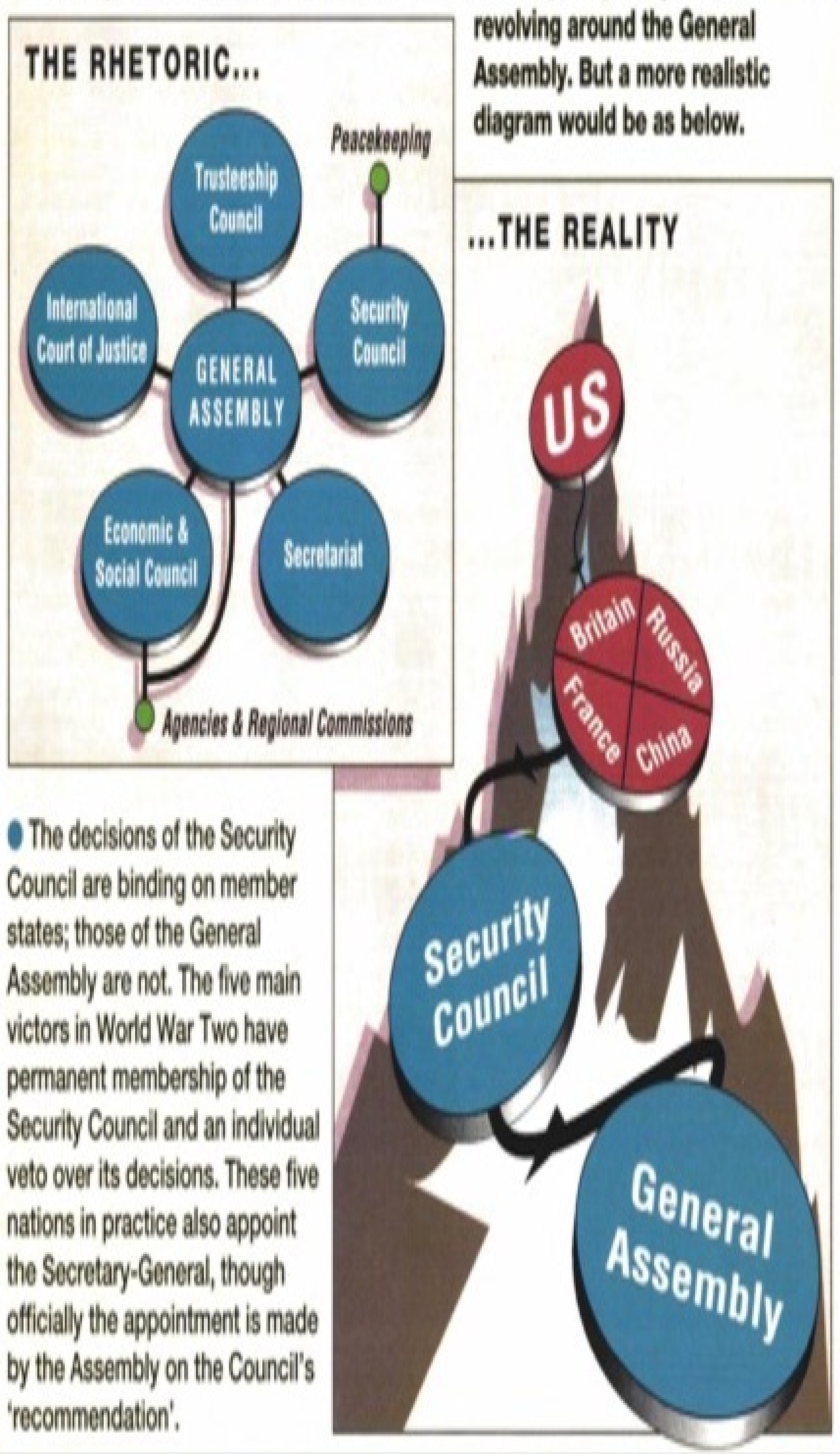
UN membership embraces virtually the whole world but continues to expand – due in the 1960s to decolonization and more recently to the arrival of smaller nation-states, especially after the break-up of the USSR.



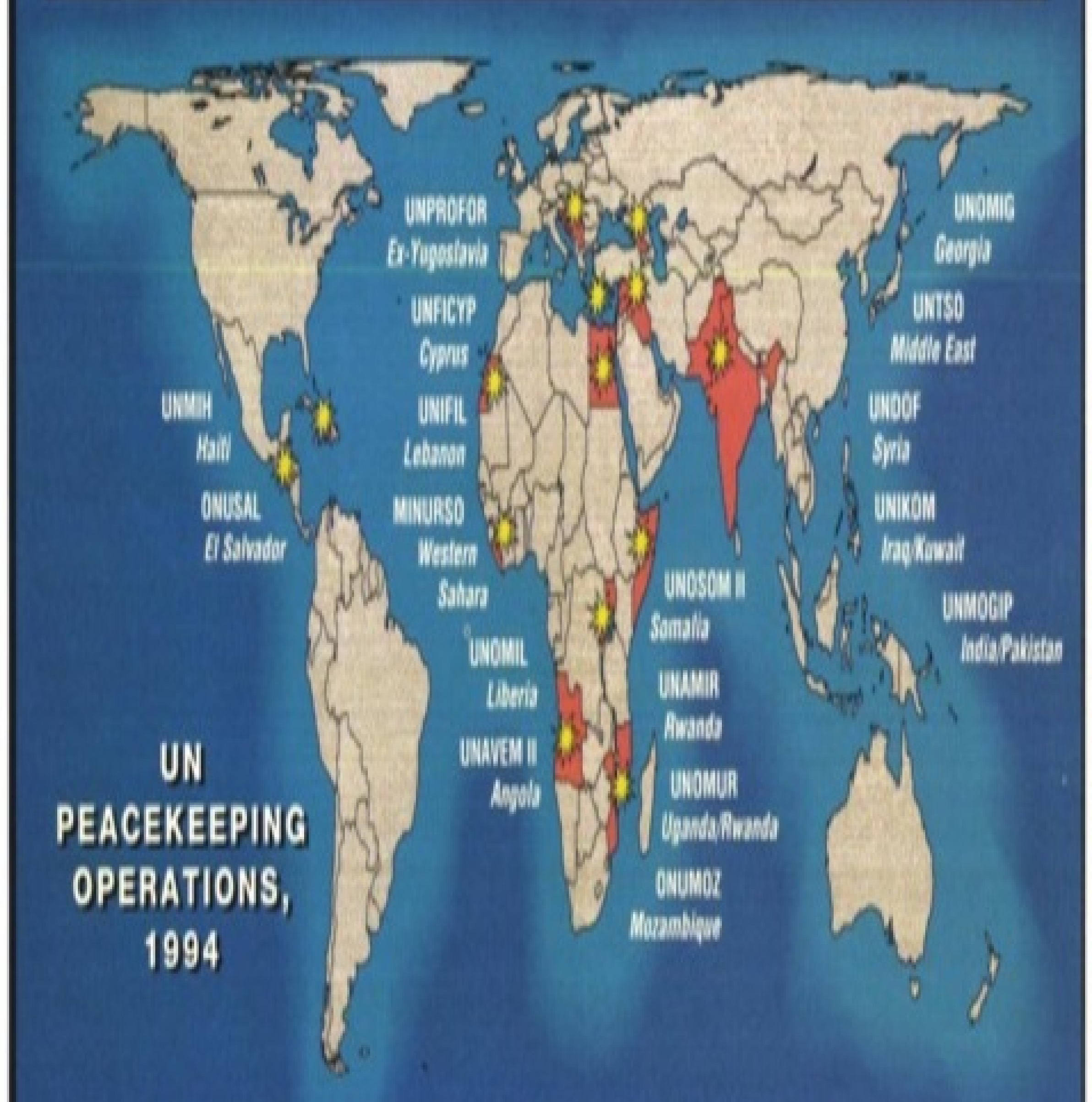
- The Swiss people voted against joining the UN in a referendum in 1986; Serbia and Montenegro have been debarred from taking up the former Yugoslavian seat at the UN and have to reapply.

THE POWER STRUCTURE

Official representations of the UN's structure show the principal organs as satellites revolving around the General Assembly. But a more realistic diagram would be as below.

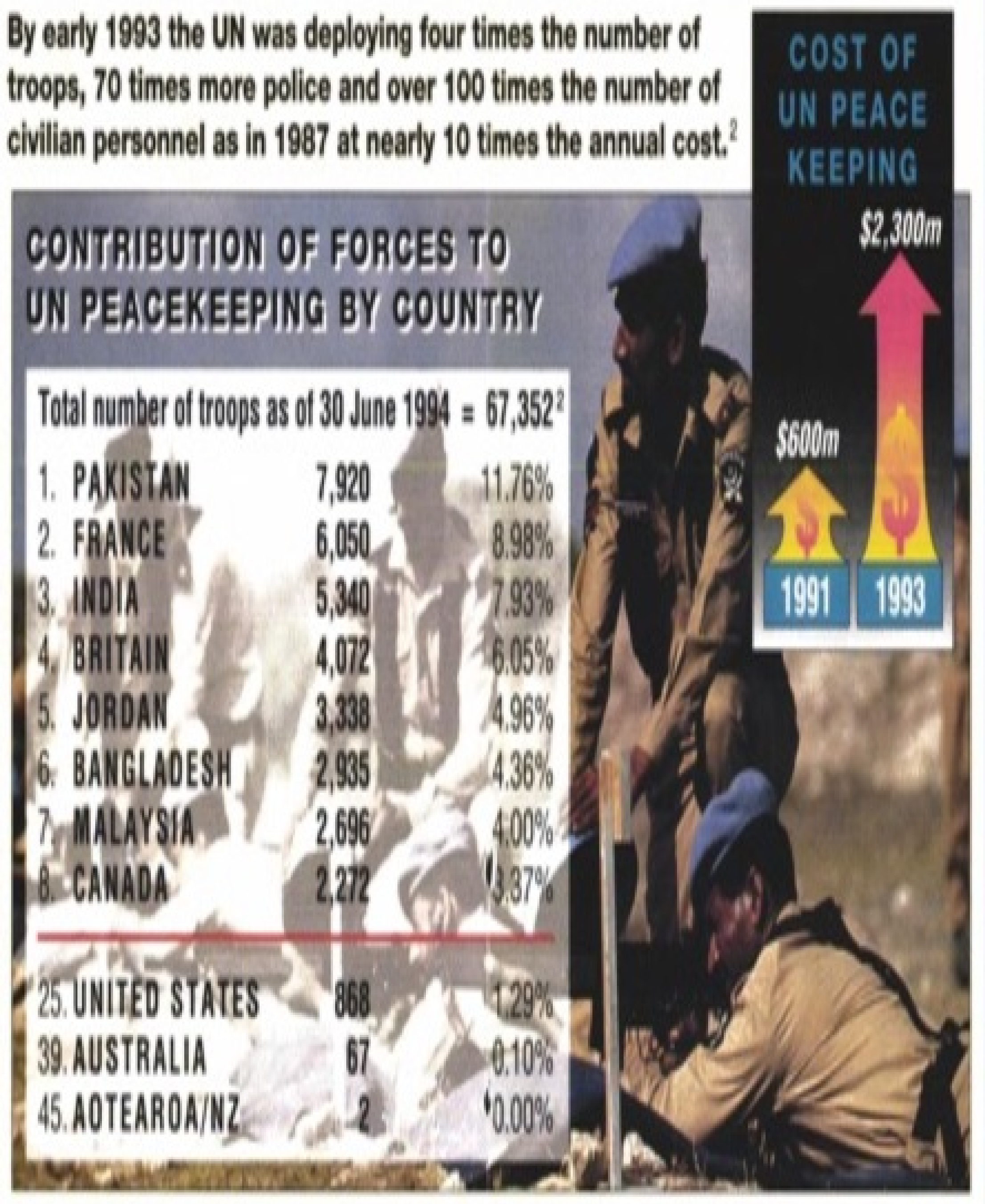

THE RHETORIC...
Trusteeship Council
Peacekeeping
International Court of Justice
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Security Council
Economic & Social Council
Secretariat
Agencies & Regional Commissions
...THE REALITY
US
Britain
Russia
France
China
Security Council
General Assembly

- The decisions of the Security Council are binding on member states; those of the General Assembly are not. The five main victors in World War Two have permanent membership of the Security Council and an individual veto over its decisions. These five nations in practice also appoint the Secretary-General, though officially the appointment is made by the Assembly on the Council's 'recommendation'.


UN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS, 1994
UNPROFOR Ex-Yugoslavia
UNFICYP Cyprus
UNIFIL Lebanon
MINURSO Western Sahara
UNOMIL Liberia
UNAVEM II Angola
UNMIH Haiti
ONUSAL El Salvador
UNOSOM II Somalia
UNAMIR Rwanda
UNOMUR Uganda/Rwanda
ONUMOZ Mozambique
UNOMIG Georgia
UNTSO Middle East
UNDOF Syria
UNIKOM Iraq/Kuwait
UNMOGIP India/Pakistan

THE PEACEKEEPERS

By early 1993 the UN was deploying four times the number of troops, 70 times more police and over 100 times the number of civilian personnel as in 1987 at nearly 10 times the annual cost.[2]



CONTRIBUTION OF FORCES TO UN PEACEKEEPING BY COUNTRY

Total number of troops as of 30 June 1994 = 67,352[2]

1. PAKISTAN	7,920	11.76%
2. FRANCE	6,050	8.98%
3. INDIA	5,340	7.93%
4. BRITAIN	4,072	6.05%
5. JORDAN	3,338	4.96%
6. BANGLADESH	2,935	4.36%
7. MALAYSIA	2,696	4.00%
8. CANADA	2,272	3.37%
25. UNITED STATES	868	1.29%
39. AUSTRALIA	67	0.10%
45. AOTEAROA/NZ	2	0.00%

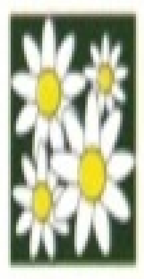
- Payment by the UN helps poor countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh offset the cost of the large standing army they want to keep for local strategic reasons. France and Britain, meanwhile, contribute mainly to the force in Bosnia, which is in their sphere of interest.

THE COSTS

The UN is routinely criticized as a big bureaucracy wasting vast amounts of public money. Yet its budget and staff numbers are small given what the world expects it to deliver.

	1993
UN regular budget (cost of Secretariat, General Assembly, Security Council etc) ➡	*$1.2 billion*
UN peacekeeping budget ➡	*$3.6 billion*[2]

The bill for the regular budget and peacekeeping is roughly the same as New York City spends on its fire and police departments.[1]



The bill for the UN's regular budget plus the costs of all its agencies and projects ($6.5 billion in 1993) is about the same as US citizens spend on cut flowers and potted plants each year.[3]

Saatchi & Saatchi

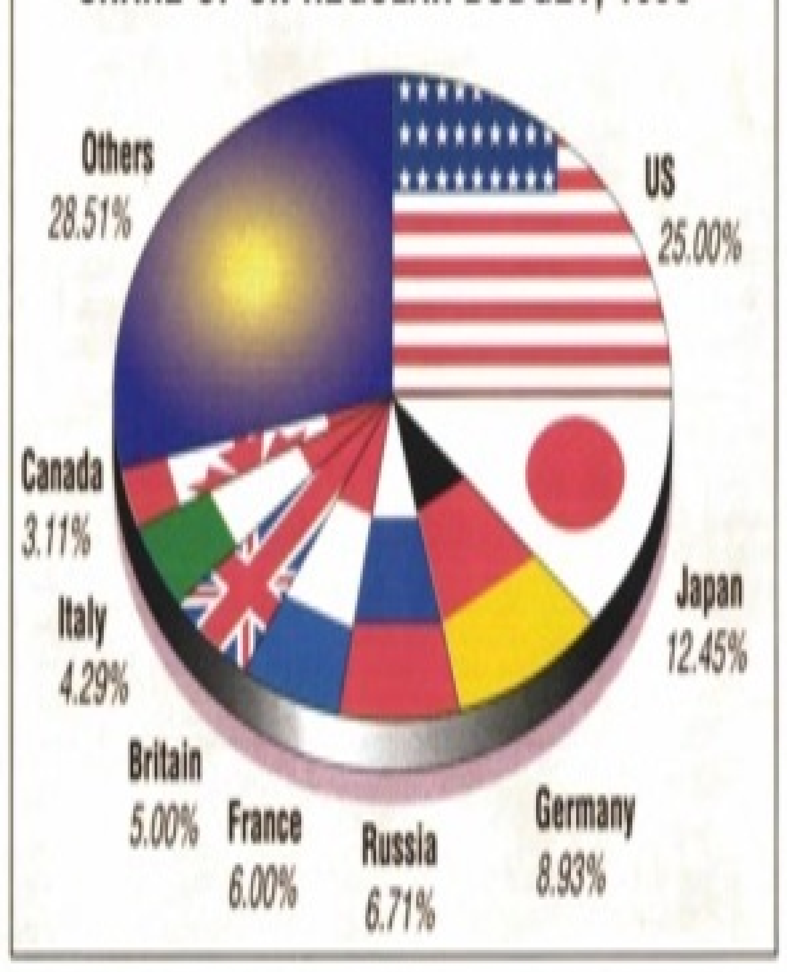
The UN Secretariat employed 9,094 staff in 1990 – a smaller civil service than the Canadian city of Winnipeg or the staff of the advertising company Saatchi & Saatchi.[1]

The UN and its agencies employed 51,484 people worldwide in 1990 – fewer than the civil service of the US state of Wyoming or the health service in Wales.[1]

WHO SHOULD PAY THE BILLS...

The US is by far the biggest contributor to the regular UN budget, though its current 25% share has been reduced from the 49% it undertook to pay in 1946.

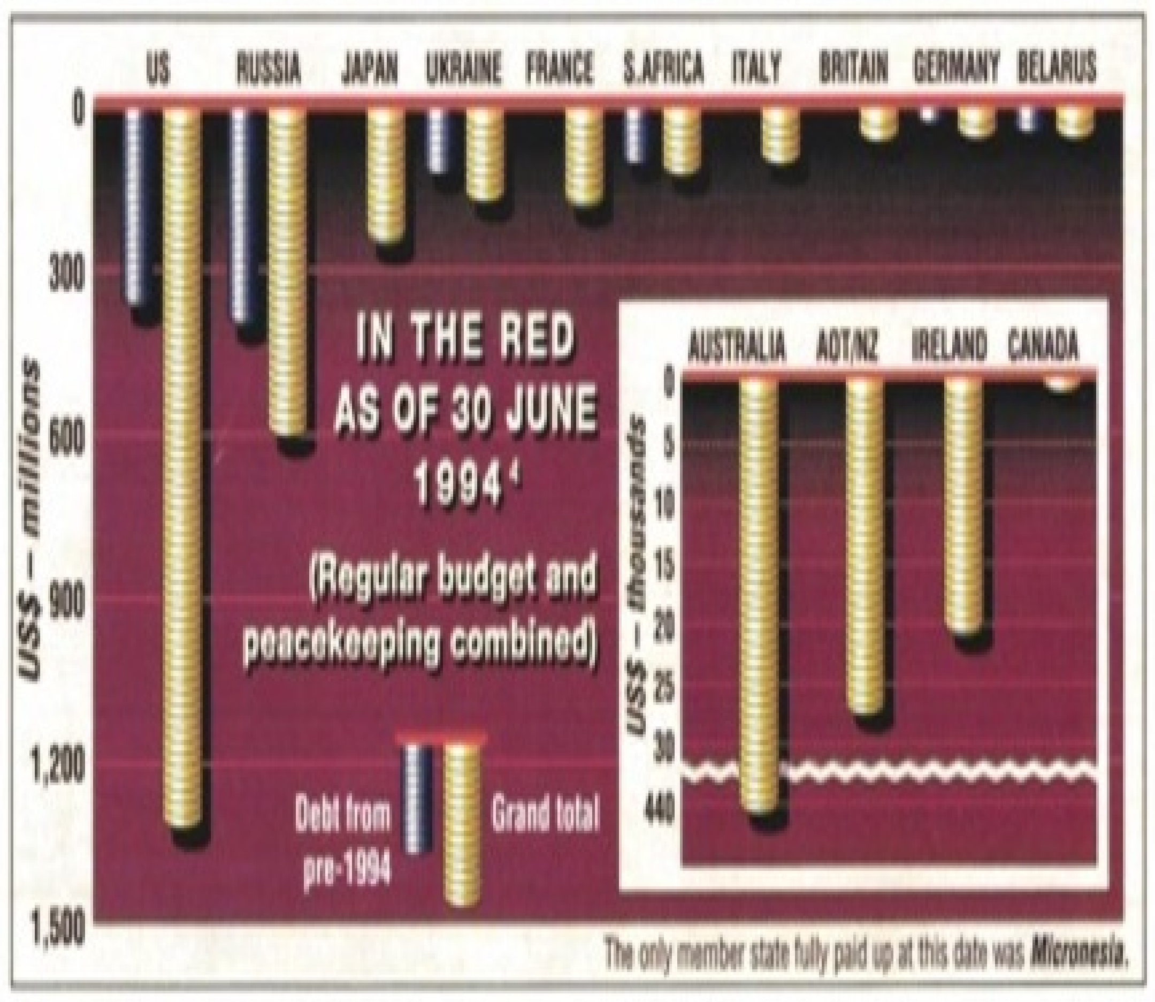
SHARE OF UN REGULAR BUDGET, 1993[4]



- No country can pay less than 0.01% of the regular budget. That was $102,000 in 1993 and was paid by 87 member countries at the bottom of the scale. Every member state must pay in US dollars – a severe disadvantage for poor countries. UN reformers are keen to reduce the percentage paid by the US to 10 or 12 per cent since the bigger the sum it pays, the more leverage it inevitably has.

...AND WHO FAILS TO PAY

The UN suffers constantly from late payment of dues by governments. The Secretary-General is not allowed to borrow even one dollar for a week, yet governments are charged no interest on the late payment of their dues.



The only member state fully paid up at this date was ***Micronesia***.

- The US is consistently behind in its payments to the UN yet the location of the main UN buildings is worth $800 million a year in net income to greater New York region – not counting the millions more spent in the US to procure materials for UN peacekeeping and development efforts.[5]

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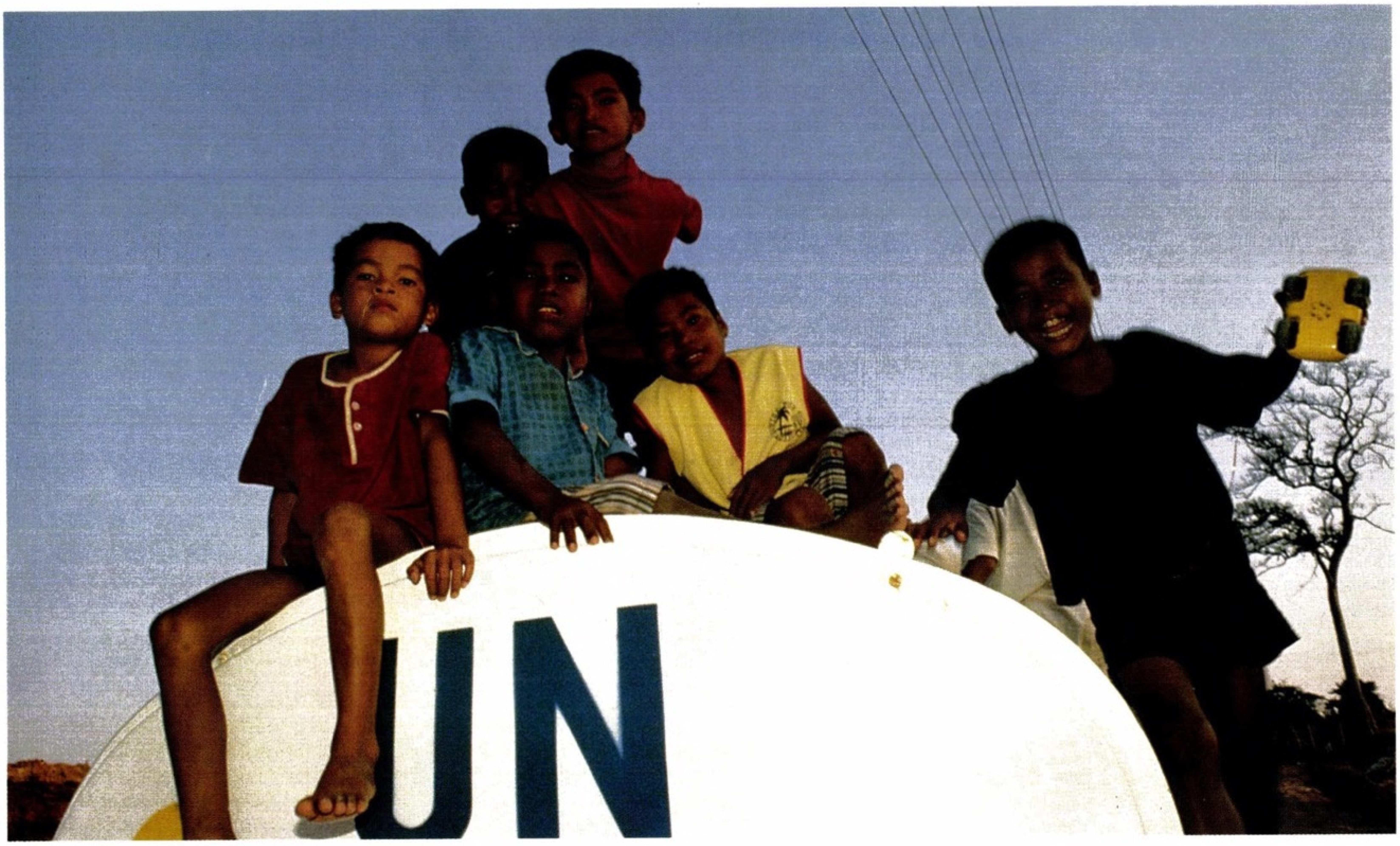
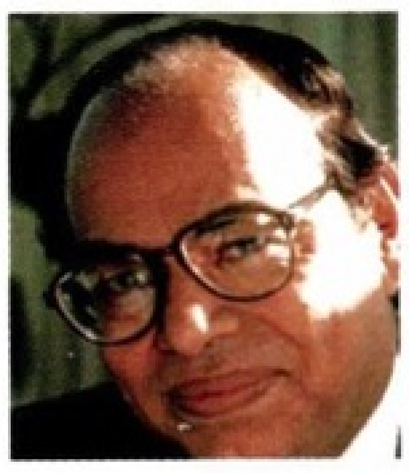
1 *Renewing the United Nations System*, Erskine Childers with Brian Urquhart, *Development Dialogue 1994:1*. **2** Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General, 13 July 1994. **3** *Surveys of Current Business*, US Department of Commerce. **4** *Assessment Table UN Doc A/48/503/Add.1*, 11 Nov 1993. **5** *UN Doc A/47/419/Add 3.*

PHOTOS: GIFFORD / LIAISON, S PETERSON / LIAISON



JACOB MAT / FRANK SPOONER PICTURES

The new deal



***Mahbub ul-Haq** is the closest thing to a visionary that the UN system possesses. Cutting through the bureaucracy and conservatism of the UN Development Programme, he has launched the Human Development Report, which annually criticizes both governments and agencies like the World Bank for their neglect of the key elements of human well-being – health, education and a decent living wage. **Chris Brazier** listens to his ideas for remaking the world.*

HAQ: The UN needs to fundamentally redefine its mandate and Charter for the future. When the UN was set up in 1945 it had two mandates. One was political security: maintaining peace. The second was socio-economic security. Even at that time the US Secretary of State said the battle for peace has to be fought on two fronts: freedom from fear and freedom from want.

BRAZIER: At that time he wasn't thinking the whole world was going to come under the aegis of the UN...

That's right – at the time the UN had only 51 members – now it has 184. It was a time when the Cold War was starting and the first pillar of security seemed the more important. Still the vision was clear: 'No provisions that can be written in the Charter will enable the Security Council to make the world free from war if men and women have no security in their homes and in their jobs.'

In its first 50 years a lot of the UN's attention went on political security. In the next 50 years a lot more attention is going to have to be paid to the security of people in their homes and jobs, their streets and their communities. In the last three years we have had 82 conflicts – defining conflicts as ones in which more than 1,000 lives were lost. And out of those 82 conflicts, 79 were within nations and only three between nations. These are conflicts between people and ethnic groups rather than between countries.

Doesn't that indicate the collapse of the nation-state?

It indicates failing states with failed development strategies and rising socio-economic disparities. These 'ethnic' struggles are not over ethnic values – they are struggles over limited jobs, declining opportunities and who is getting them. At heart the struggles are socio-economic.

So you think that if we address the socio-economic needs of those people we can carry on living with the concept of the nation-state? That concept is pretty fundamental to the way the UN is structured at the moment...

That is true. Of course the character of nation-states has changed – their power is a lot more decentralized. The days of very centralized nation-states in the developing world – which could only be maintained through a good deal of authoritarianism – are over. There are so many ethnic groups, regional tensions and fights for resources that probably government can only succeed if it is taken closer to the people.

In many ways I see the current situation, which is generally seen as collapse in Africa and elsewhere, not as dreadful but as a healthy sign of democratic change. There'll be tremendous trauma because unfortunately the change is coming at a time of declining incomes, fewer jobs, limited opportunities, tremendous fights over resources. But I don't think these countries were in a better state ten years ago just because some authoritarian ruler was able to suppress all social movements.

It's been worse this year in Rwanda than it was ten years ago...

Yes, there will always be places like that. But in most cases the situation has moved towards pluralism and democracy. Take Latin America – ten years ago you could hardly find a country in which there was not a military dictator. Now you can barely find a country in which elections have not been held. Take Asia. Ten years ago many of these countries were under martial law – the Philippines, Bangladesh, my own country Pakistan. Democracy is a struggle for them but at least the checks and balances are emerging and accountability is coming slowly.

There have been 120 conflicts in the Third World since the Second World War and 22 million people have died... And we call it an era of unprecedented peace: that's because the blood spilt was Third World blood and not European and American blood.

This has taken us some distance from the United Nations...

I think the UN has to do a number of things. First, it has to recognize conceptually that the security of *people* is just as important as the security of nations, that the conflicts now are within nations rather than between them. Second, it must develop an early-warning system of preventive development and preventive diplomacy. The UN cannot prevent these disasters unless it can forecast five, ten years earlier what is going to be a future Somalia, Rwanda or Bosnia. Otherwise it will always be too late and the costs of being too late are very high.

THE CRUSADER

WORKING FOR THE UN

I WORK for the UN, I tell people. And I've barely met anyone who hasn't been impressed. It's like they do a double-take and see you with entirely new eyes. Suddenly I've become someone engaged in the most 'worthwhile' work of all, a sort of crusading nurse to the sick and dying world. But when you're here in this building it's pretty hard to retain that sense. You can't help but get pissed off by the slow churning of the bureaucracy, by the deadwoods who are promoted above you for 'political' reasons. Yet sometimes I do a double-take of my own – I look at myself behind my desk with its view of the East River and ask 'do you seriously think what you're doing here is making a difference?' And in the end my answer is always the same: the UN may not be what people think it is, let alone what it should be, but I wouldn't want to live in a world without it. I think deep down I'm as proud that I work for the UN as people assume I must be.

(A composite based on conversations with present and former UN employees in New York)

The third thing the UN will have to develop is new guidelines for intervention. At the moment intervention is largely decided by superpower whims – whether to intervene in Somalia and not in Bosnia, whether the French should go to Rwanda. If the UN is not to become a new multilateral imperialism invoked by superpowers I think new guidelines have to be discussed by the Security Council. When to intervene, how to intervene and for how long. Otherwise we're back to the whole philosophy of colonialism which was 'the natives can't handle it, let's go in and teach them'.

Fourth, the UN must move aggressively on disarmament in the developing world. Since 1987 global military spending has gone down – but not in the developing world. The two regions where it has gone up rather than down are the poorest – sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. In South Asia alone, my own region, Pakistan and India spend 20 billion dollars a year on defence but people are sleeping on the pavement. India and Pakistan in the last four years bought twice as many arms as Saudi Arabia, even though Saudi Arabia is 20 times richer. And who sold them? The five permanent members of the Security Council supplied 86 per cent of them.

Disarmament has missed out the Third World and yet that is where the wars have recently taken place. There have been 120 conflicts, major and minor in the Third World since the Second World War and 22 million people have died – more Third World people than ever died in the Second World War. And we call it an era of unprecedented peace: that's because the blood spilt was Third World blood and not European and American blood.

I'm interested that these key points of your vision of what the UN can be and do are so related to the security situation rather than to a new international economic order...

I think if the new international economic order comes it will be through the strength of the developing world, not through charity. The objective of the 1970s was not wrong – of course we need more equity between nations and between people. But the tactics were wrong. Developing countries reached out for international justice while denying economic justice to their own people. That was hypocritical. Indeed they were buying arms with one hand from the very countries from whom they were demanding economic concessions with the other.

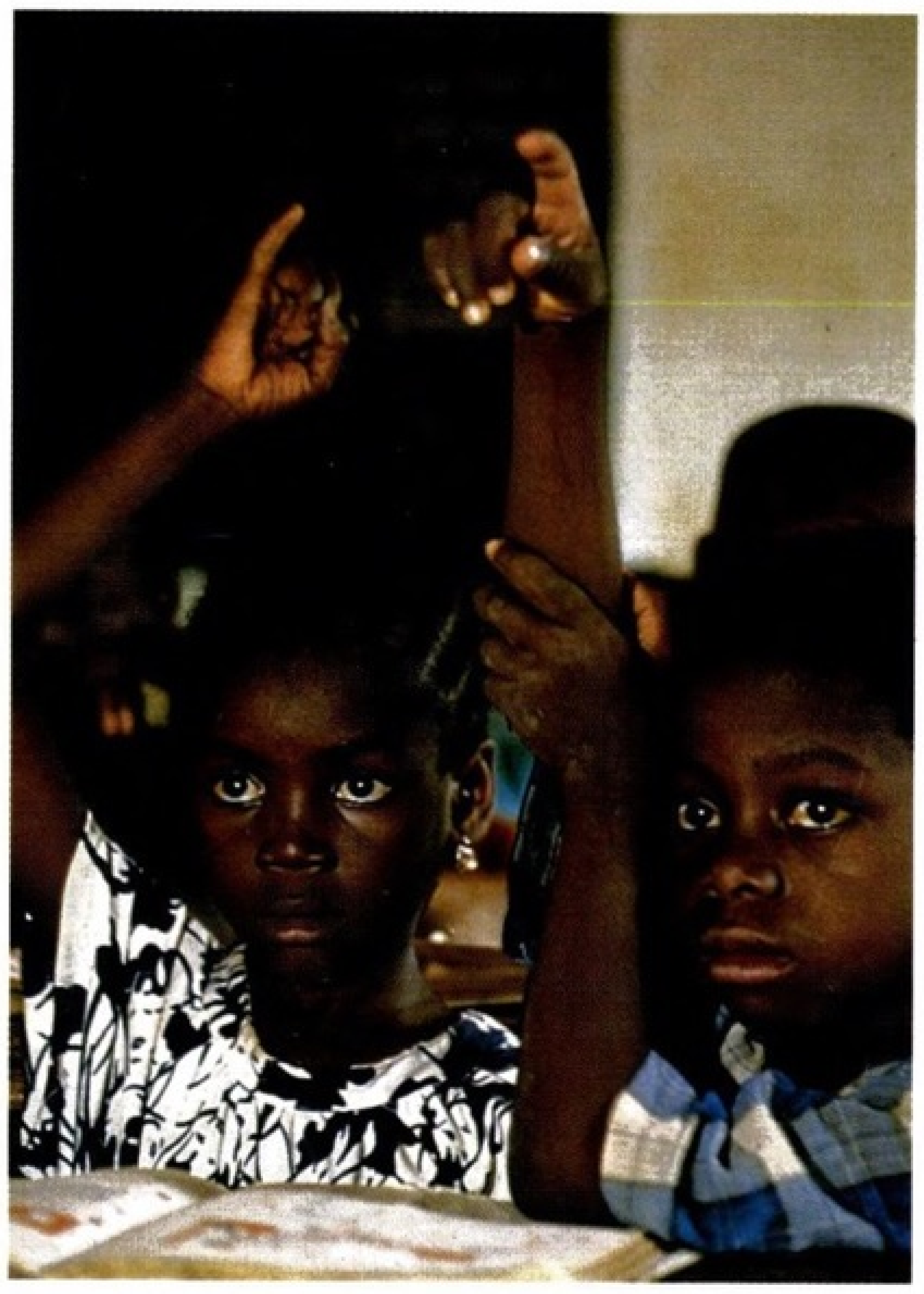
The vision of the 1990s is totally different from that of the 1970s. Basically aid is going to be phased out – it's a reality of the past and not of the future; you can't base the future of nations on charity. So I don't think aid, dialogue or some tremendous transfer of concessional resources, which was the vision of the 1970s, is pertinent.

The dialogue of the future is about more access to global opportunities for trade and investment and migration and the free movement of the market. I believe that applying market principles internationally would favour developing countries.

You do? They might not agree with you...

The advantage of the market is with the developing world because they have much cheaper and increasingly more skilled labour. Whether it is computer technologies or other technologies of the future they can master them because there is six times more educated output in the developing world than in the industrial world. If intelligence is randomly distributed in the world there is no reason to believe that

Hands up for human development – a primary school in Burkina Faso.



ERIC CONGO / FRANK SPOONER PICTURES

CAROL LEE / NETWORK

Guns without roses – a weapons dealer plies his trade from an open-fronted shop on Pakistan's North-West Frontier.

they can't outcompete the industrial world despite the advantage of capital.

Basically capital will have to move towards these developing countries to combine with their labour because of the demographic revolution. Last year 95 per cent of the new babies were born in the Third World and only 5 per cent in industrial countries. Once world population stabilizes this will be the reality of the late twenty-first century. And as such the advantage will shift towards the developing countries if they can get people educated and give them skills. That is what East Asia has done and it has taken only a short time for countries like Thailand to be just dancing around investing in people – this is the real human-development model.

THE MOLE

WORKING FOR THE UN

ONCE I earned a living writing about events in a way that made them intelligible to ordinary people. Now I earn a living making the world's most impenetrable documents halfway intelligible to an élite whose business is saving the world. Last year it was Dhaka, Bogota and New York. This year it's Abidjan, Bangkok and Geneva. But wherever I am it's pretty much the same story: an uncomfortable chair, a flickering screen and a desk piled high with tomes like *Capital Utilization of Local and Foreign Establishments in Malaysian Manufacturing* and *Vertical Inter-Firm Linkages in LDCs: An Empirical Study.* Or my personal favourites *Sewerage Planning in the Greater Taipei Area: A Master Plan Report* and *Review of Work Done on Rural Latrines in India.* I often feel like a mole tunnelling through subterranean depths of reports and academic thinking unknown to the rest of humanity. And when I emerge blinking into the light from my airconditioned tunnel I occasionally forget whether I'm going to be attacked by a Swiss winter or a Bangladeshi monsoon.

(Based on the experience of a writer freelancing for UN agencies)

How does this faith in the free market differ from what the World Bank or the IMF might say?

Because I would then say you have to be consistent. Any countries which violate market principles and erect trade barriers should compensate; any countries which erect migration barriers should compensate; any countries which harm the environment should compensate. Just as polluters pay domestically so polluting nations should pay internationally. If you apply market principles in this way then developing countries could gain a five to ten per cent transfer of resources. They have been fighting for 0.7 per cent of aid for so long as a charity principle – they should chance the market principle.

But aren't developing countries going to have to fight for this too? It seems very optimistic to think that all will come right if the market is allowed to operate freely. It's the kind of view one might find coming out of an extreme right-wing thinktank.

The markets at the moment are being allowed to work only where they favour the rich, not the poor. Just think about the implications of an *environmental market.* Nobody can pollute the global environment without having to pay for it – and rich countries produce 80 per cent of global emissions. That principle is going to come sooner or later – there's no other way to end pollution. It's not going to be done by treaties or by agreements because they don't have any force. Ultimately it's going to be done by the price mechanism.

And is the UN going to be the agent of that?

Unfortunately no industrial country talked about this kind of market mechanism at the time of the Earth Summit. But now let's take the *migration market.* Milton Friedman and the Chicago School argued that labour should be totally free, should be globalized. If people were allowed to work anywhere then developing countries could gain today between 300 and 500 billion dollars a year in transfers compared to the 60 billion dollars they get in aid. In India, Pakistan and Bangladesh the remittances they're getting in even today from workers abroad are larger than their development assistance – and these are untied and don't have to be repaid.

Can we come back to the UN specifically?

The UN has to be more active on disarmament in the Third World. One of the indicators of potential trouble spots is the ratio of military expenditure to social spending – how much a country spends on armies and how much on the health and education of its people. We looked back at 1980 to see which countries had the highest ratio. Number one was Iraq – eight times more on military than on education and health. Number two was Somalia – five times more. Number three was Nicaragua, three-and-a-half times more. Within a decade these countries could neither protect their national security, for which they were getting all these arms, nor their human security. And the countries that supplied their weapons in 1980 were itching to get in a decade later to collect them. Now surely some action could be taken at the Social Summit [next year in Copenhagen] to keep arms out of the most vulnerable countries. If nothing else they should agree to stop arms shipments to Africa.

Would you like to see UN development work more centralized?

Yes. I have been advocating an integrated UN development authority. If we were setting things up now we would unquestionably have one strong UN development authority with a strong human-development message and more than five billion a year in grant money, not in loans. Yet we've split it up into five development funds and many specialized agencies. I would like to see how efficient the World Bank would be if it were split into 20 agencies – one for population, one for education and so on, in 20 different cities with 20 different governing councils and 20 different leaders.

ANTHONY SUAU / NETWORK

Out of the haze and into the light. Benazir Bhutto campaigning in elections following Pakistan's years of military rule.

But at least when there are so many agencies some of them can do good work while others are going down the pan. If you merged them it might all go bad.

I'm not so sure – that depends entirely on the leadership. Of course from the Secretary-General down the methods of choosing leaders are very politicized. And certainly if there were one UN development authority then you would need a very powerful leader. But I believe in institutions. Institutions can survive and can be strong even when they are at times not blessed with the best leaders. The World Bank has always remained strong whether it had McNamara or Clausen at the top. But you can't have 20 different agencies fighting for turf with very little money and different guidelines. We need one development message, one development office, one field office.

We've got to get our act together. Even if we don't integrate we have to have much better policy co-ordination and work under the same umbrella rather than amid the current confusion.

Would you want to be head of a new centralized development agency? I've heard rumours that you've been angling for the directorship of a specialized agency...

No. I want to get home next year. My objective in the UN was to create a ferment of ideas and to make policy-makers uncomfortable. Basically I've enjoyed myself thoroughly over the last five years. I don't think the international world has enjoyed it so much – they've been extremely uncomfortable at times. But I wouldn't accept any institutional position now. I want now to see what I can do for my own country and that's where the real test will come, whether I can apply any of my ideas.

> **We need one development message, one development office, one field office. We've got to get our act together.**

Are you planning to go back to being Finance Minister in Pakistan? What do you say to the charge that you failed to put your human-development principles into practice when you had that role before?

Yes, many people think I'm only producing the *Human Development Report* in order to atone for my failure with this human-development business as a minister. I've been asked several times in the last five years to go back as Finance Minister. I didn't want to do that – I lived through that experience for eight years and I was not able to do very much. I did accomplish some things but I was part of a very élitist system dominated by landlords in the Assembly, by élitist groups in the Government, and by the Army, which would not let any trade-off take place between military and social expenditure. So the options were really hemmed in. While I can and might go back to the Cabinet I want to keep a good deal of independence this time.

I want to see if I can bring some pressure to bear in South Asia for a new deal. Things have been happening all over the world – even the IRA may be giving up arms and looking for a political settlement. Why not India and Pakistan? Why not a farewell to arms and more human development? The stakes are very high and my feeling is that the time is coming when there will be a new deal for the billion people in South Asia. That's what I want to commit myself to for the next five years. ■

NAVIGATING UN REFORM

Try to pilot your peacekeepers through the hazardous maze of city streets full of snipers and booby traps to successful reform of the UN Security Council.

START
UN
Should the Security Council be changed?
NO
YES
Your next problem is the veto. On big issues all five permanent members currently have a veto. How would you change this?
Scrap the veto.
Extend the veto to new permanent members.
Rule that the veto only applies if two permanent members agree to exercise it.
Add Japan and Germany but also guarantee seats to a minimum number of Southern countries.

You walked straight into an ambush. The UN can't function effectively in its current form and will ultimately fall apart if it does nothing.

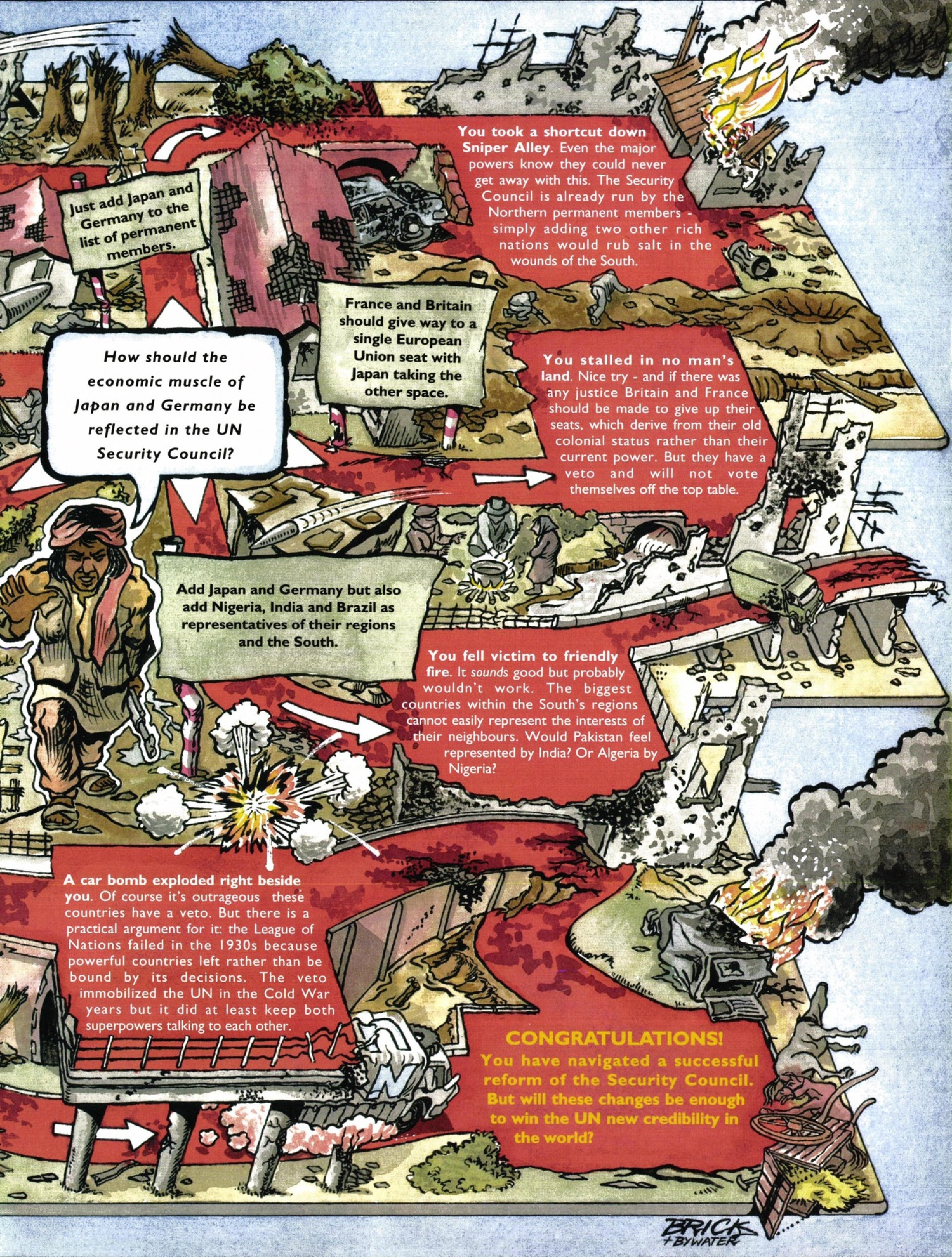
Pass on. That was the easy part. Even the major veto-holding powers now accept that the Council reflects the balance of power immediately after the Second World War and that it needs to change.

A direct hit by a mortar from the surrounding hills. The more vetos there are, the more likely the UN is to be stalled. Better to create a new status of non-veto-holding permanent member.

Pass on. This would be a constructive and useful change and it's just possible that in a climate clamouring for reform the major powers would consent. At the moment Britain follows Washington's direction so completely that the US could easily raise two votes against. But circumstances and governments change and the US could be isolated in the future.

Pass on. It doesn't sound spectacular but it's as good an outcome as we can hope for now.

YOUR BRIEF At present the Security Council has 15 members. Five of these – the US, Britain, France, Russia and China – have permanent membership and hold a veto. All other nations rotate, serving two-year terms. You must decide whether and how this system should change. But careful: you're reforming rather than abolishing the Council, so think about what is possible, not what is ideal.



How should the economic muscle of Japan and Germany be reflected in the UN Security Council?
Just add Japan and Germany to the list of permanent members.
France and Britain should give way to a single European Union seat with Japan taking the other space.
Add Japan and Germany but also add Nigeria, India and Brazil as representatives of their regions and the South.
BRICK + BYWATER

You took a shortcut down Sniper Alley. Even the major powers know they could never get away with this. The Security Council is already run by the Northern permanent members - simply adding two other rich nations would rub salt in the wounds of the South.

You stalled in no man's land. Nice try - and if there was any justice Britain and France should be made to give up their seats, which derive from their old colonial status rather than their current power. But they have a veto and will not vote themselves off the top table.

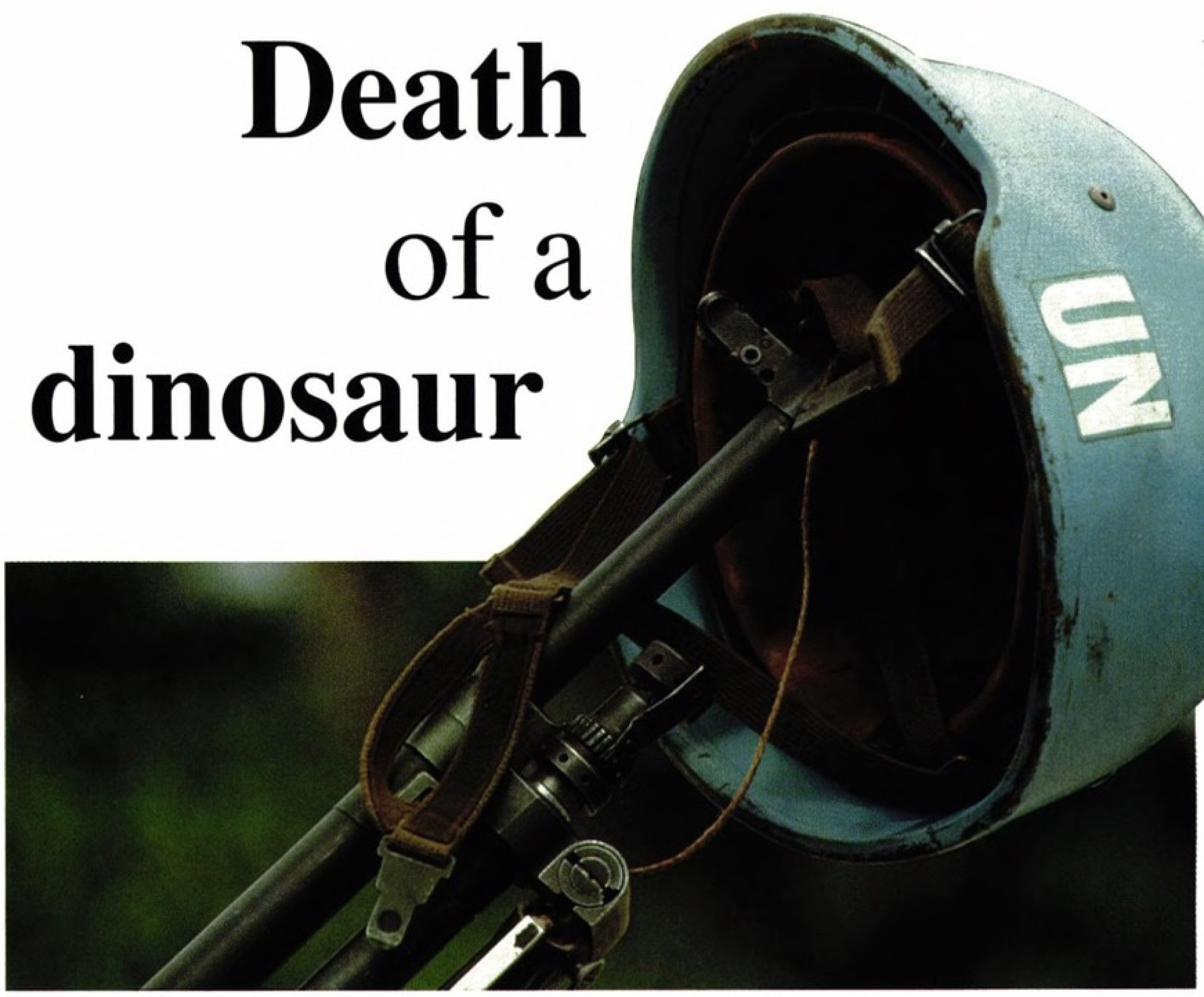
You fell victim to friendly fire. It *sounds* good but probably wouldn't work. The biggest countries within the South's regions cannot easily represent the interests of their neighbours. Would Pakistan feel represented by India? Or Algeria by Nigeria?

A car bomb exploded right beside you. Of course it's outrageous these countries have a veto. But there is a practical argument for it: the League of Nations failed in the 1930s because powerful countries left rather than be bound by its decisions. The veto immobilized the UN in the Cold War years but it did at least keep both superpowers talking to each other.

CONGRATULATIONS!

You have navigated a successful reform of the Security Council. But will these changes be enough to win the UN new credibility in the world?

Death of a dinosaur



P JONES GRIFFITHS / MAGNUM

***Richard Gott** argues that the UN is collapsing – and welcomes the prospect.*

THE United Nations, forever bumbling away in the background, has been so much part of our lives for the past half century that it is difficult to imagine the time when it won't be there any more. Yet all the evidence suggests its days are numbered.

Many people hoped that the UN would rise phoenix-like from the ashes of the Cold War, but these early hopes have clearly not been fulfilled. Today its very existence is in doubt. In the last year or so, as its activities in former Yugoslavia, Somalia and Cambodia have been closely scrutinized, the UN has come under sustained attack – from press and politicians and the public. It is not perceived as 'our' UN any longer, but as someone else's, and 'those people', whoever they may be, are now endlessly portrayed as corrupt and incompetent.

Overstretched and underfunded, bureaucratically and unimaginatively organized, the UN is perceived to straddle the globe like a dinosaur, fed only by the pious hopes of those (now rather elderly) people who once dreamed that it could be used to forge a better world; and by those time-serving diplomats created in each other's image who make up what is sometimes almost laughingly referred to as 'the international community'. From Sarajevo to Phnom Penh, from Nicosia to San Salvador, the UN's thin blue line of 'peacekeeping forces' is uncertainly deployed, confused participants in a global strategy that has lost all historical validity and over which no group or sentient individual seems to have adequate control.

Given the head of steam that is building up against it, it seems likely that the UN, like the League of Nations before it, will have vanished into history by the end of the century. The programmes put forward for its reform, most recently the American suggestion that Germany and Japan should be admitted to the Security Council, are not signs of life but symptoms of its decline.

A couple of years ago I spent some months in New York with the purpose of examining the activities of the Security Council and the General Assembly at close quarters. Travelling there with the usual set of historically acquired assumptions common to the liberal left, I was prepared to believe that the UN was an interesting and potentially progressive institution with a new lease of life. Though traditionally under the control of the great powers, there was a clear possibility that, with the end of the Cold War, it might enjoy some new flexibility of manoeuvre.

> **We should regard the UN with the same kind of suspicion that was once reserved by the Left for the CIA**

I returned with a somewhat different set of beliefs that have become hardened over time. Today's UN is an intrinsically conservative institution, operating almost solely for the benefit of the advanced capitalist world. It is no longer capable of reform along progressive lines, particularly after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Third World.

Public support for the UN in Western countries is now conspicuous by its absence and this will prove eventually to be its Achilles' heel. An isolationist President in the US, with the Americans concentrating on internal affairs and the breakdown of their own country, will have neither the time nor the inclination to manipulate the UN. Without active American support the organization will implode.

We have got used to thinking of 'the West' as a coherent and cohesive unit, yet this era is clearly drawing to a close. The G7 countries may soon fall out among themselves. The US itself may never again take a leadership role. We spend so much time extrapolating existing trends – particularly in the ecological debate – that we often forget our political parameters can suddenly change, just as they have since 1989.

To understand what is happening we need now to go back in history and ask ourselves why we have supported such an extraordinary concept as a world organization at all. The great international organiz-ations we have known in this century – the League of Nations and the UN – have always been assemblies of colonial powers designed essentially to prevent inter-imperial conflict. That has been the pattern and it is difficult to see how it could be changed.

The General Assembly of the UN is not, and could never be, a democratic organization. If it were, the world would be run by the Chinese. One has only to look at the difficulties of organizing a United Europe to realize that a United World would be a wholly utopian venture. Public opinion in the West is utterly unprepared to accept losing its soldiers in foreign wars that it is in no way geared to comprehend.

So I believe now that we should rid ourselves of any residual enthusiasm for the UN; we should regard it with the same kind of suspicion that was once reserved by the Left for the CIA or any other institution that seeks to protect the privileges of the status quo powers. We should shed no tears if it were to disappear.

In the philosophically post-modern world in which we are now regrettably forced to live, the UN – with its all-embracing centralist ambitions – is a dangerous anachronism. ■

Richard Gott is literary editor of Britain's *The Guardian*, where these ideas were first aired.

ANTONIO RIBEIRO / GAMMA

ET phone home: hotline to the White House from the Earth Summit in Rio.

Fudging, mudging and a thousand flowers

*Every year the UN holds at least one major conference: we've just had population and next year social development and women will take their turn. Are these gatherings just talking shops or do they actually achieve something? **Maggie Black** investigates.*

THE ruined church of San Francisco in Zacatecas, northern Mexico, bulges with dignitaries, officials and a children's choir. This magnificent building, now used for state occasions, lost its roof during a decisive battle in the 1914 Mexican Revolution. Today, Governor Arturo Romo de Gutierrez has 'a new revolution' to offer. 'We must build a new world, a society of peace, democracy and progress in which all can live well, especially the children.' Romo's new state policy in favour of the child – better health care, more rural schools, more popular participation – is a central plank of his programme.

This language of political commitment to children, and the impulse of Romo's social reforms, can be easily traced to their source. They come from an international meeting held under UN auspices. President Carlos Salinas de Gortari of Mexico was a prominent backer of the World Summit for Children, held in New York in 1990. At the Summit 71 leaders signed a 'World Declaration' and 'Plan of Action' for children with various goals for attainment by the year 2000. Mexico was one of the first countries to lay out a programme to put these promises into effect. Salinas has since held a number of 'evaluations' – national versions of the showy occasion in Zacatecas – at which ministers recount achievements to prolonged and publicized applause.

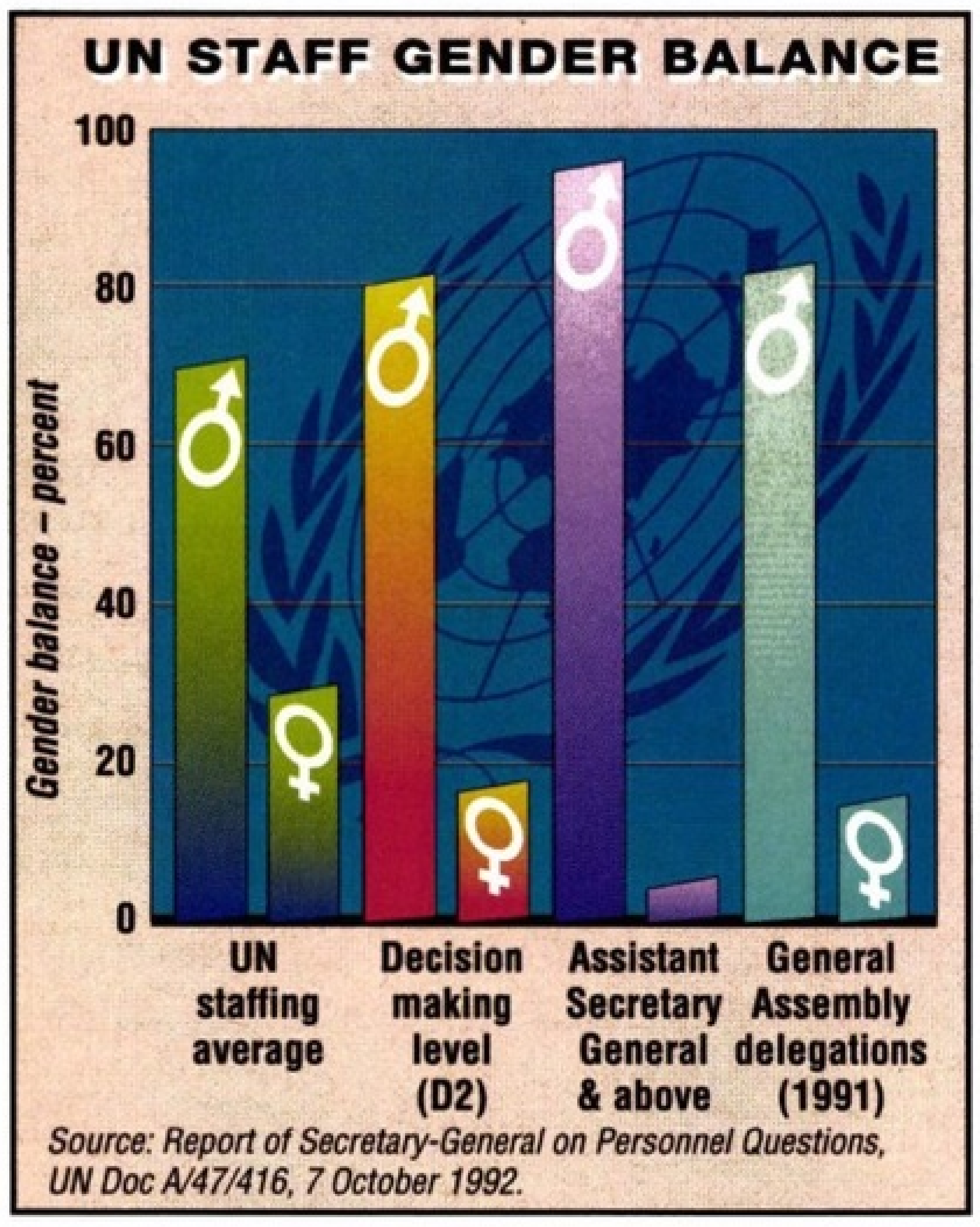
This was back in August when Mexico's ruling party was frantic to win an election. So it is easy to be cynical: to suggest that all of this 'social policy in favour of children' is just a sophisticated version of kissing babies on the hustings. But what cannot be doubted is that the rhetoric of the Children's Summit has passed onto the national level – and not just in Mexico. It is commonly said that what is needed in international affairs is less rhetoric and more action on the ground. But when you find, four years on, state governors instigating new social programmes and transforming local structures, that argument falters.

Where does rhetoric end and action begin? If the 52 municipalities of Zacatecas now start packing ex-churches to herald a drop in infant mortality, will cynics still mutter 'circuses, circuses'? When the rhetoric of reform surfaces this close to the village community, it must be possible to state with confidence that the World Summit for Children actually did something for those in whose name it was held. And this has to be the test. For all the fine words and ringing declarations, UN conferences mean nothing unless they lead to action.

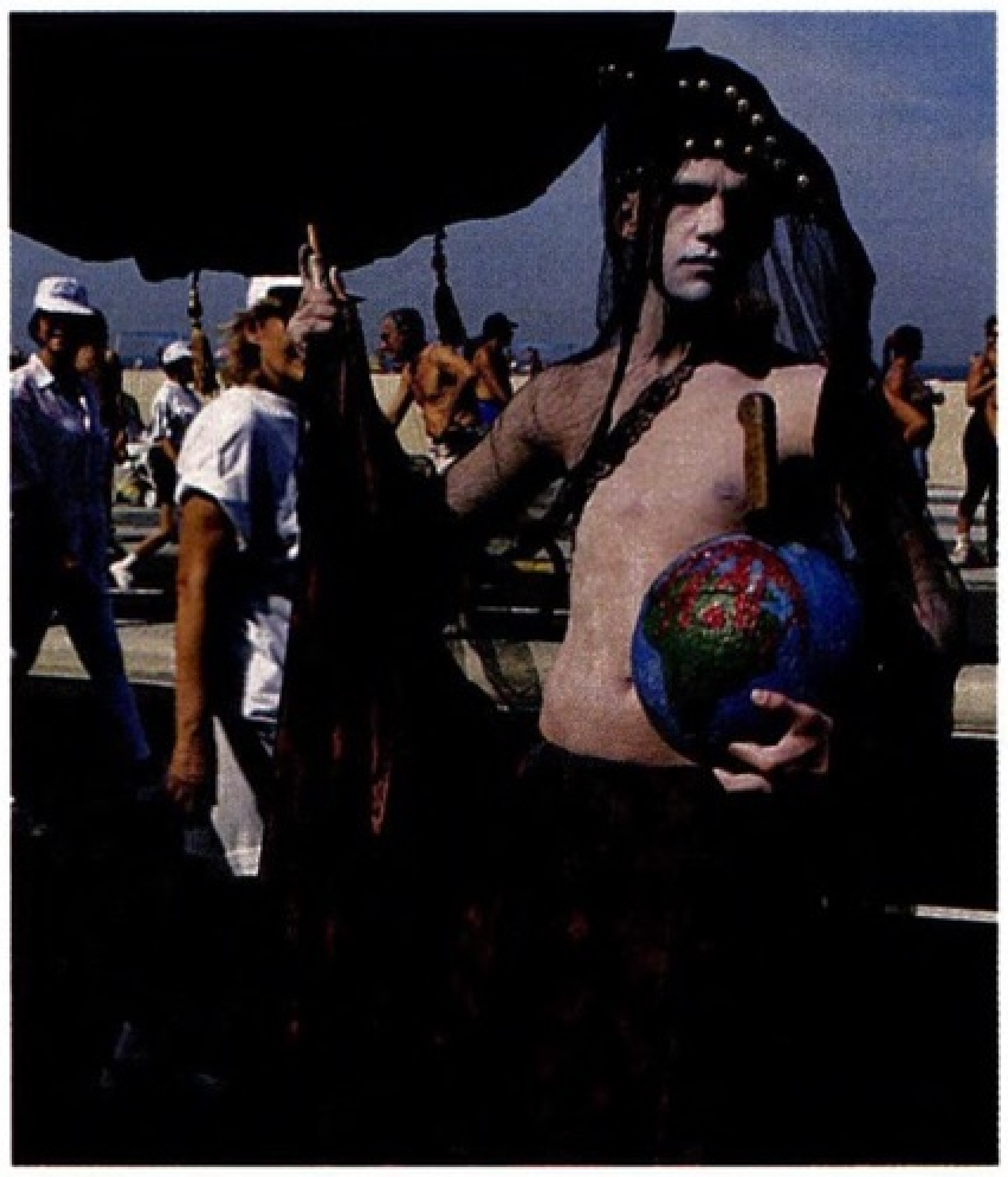
International conferences became part of the world landscape in the wake of decolonization when the UN was suddenly confronted with the need for 'development' in the poverty-stricken South. In the 1960s and 1970s, the new post-colonial issues began surging onto the global agenda. Existing UN mechanisms could not handle them and conferences filled the vacuum. A 1972 UN conference on the environment in Stockholm set the new trend. It was followed by gatherings on population, food, women, human settlements, employment, water and desertification. Apart from establishing yet more UN bodies – all in need of funding – to take these issues forward, it was not clear what they achieved. A resolution was even passed in the General Assembly that the international chat show should cease. It barely drew breath, however.

In the 1990s, we are coming round to the same subjects for the third or fourth time. The events have become larger, noisier and more expensive; their agendas have become longer, more contentious and complex; and the crises surrounding most of the issues have deepened, not gone away. Why do governments go on supporting UN resolutions to hold yet more international conferences and allocating precious resources from their development-assistance budgets to make them happen? To some observers, these conferences are nothing more than ritualized wars of words in which only the practising parties – diplomats, delegates, lobbyists – have a meaningful interest.

Others are convinced of their importance. Stephen Lewis, former Canadian Ambassador to the UN, is one. 'These conferences are the vehicle for the UN in the 1990s – attempts to mobilize opinion and influence the policy of member states. This is the way the world is setting its agenda.' He points not just to the successes stemming from the World Summit, but to advances for women coming out of conferences in Nairobi and Vienna, and the positive influence of the Earth Summit's Agenda 21 on many governments' environmental policies. He is certain that the two conferences next year – the Social Summit in Copenhagen and the Women's Conference in Beijing – will also be translated into action.



Source: Report of Secretary-General on Personnel Questions, UN Doc A/47/416, 7 October 1992.



SUE CUNNINGHAM

Medium as message: the Earth Summit was a turning-point for campaigners

Conferences have become much more important, Lewis believes, since non-governmental organizations (NGOs) began to play an active part. In the 1970s, NGOs were – as now – allowed to have their own forum alongside the main event. But the conference was strictly an inter-governmental affair. By persistent lobbying and hard work, NGOs have managed to change this.

They have fought for the right to speak at formal sessions, even if they cannot take part in the negotiations. Increasingly, their representatives are being included on government delegations and given access to classified briefs. Some government delegations use NGOs' pressure upon them as part of their own bargaining hand.

The Earth Summit was a turning-point. In the run-up to Rio, NGOs definitely made a difference, according to Koy Thompson of the International Institute for Environment and Development. He credits sustained NGO lobbying with the repeated use in Agenda 21 of language such as 'community-driven', 'community-based' and 'participatory' to describe the structures needed for sustainable development.

Those who participate in the 'conference process' in all its intensity naturally tend to develop a commitment to it. The international agreements they generate are produced only after thousands of hours of dedicated negotiation on clause after clause, word after word, in which a nuance of meaning can easily derail the mildest of formulations. Finally the war of words, on the conference floor and in the media, builds to a climax. When it's all over, usually at midnight on the very last day, there is a great sense of triumph. But in reality this is only the beginning. Now comes the question of whether countries will stick to the agreement.

We are back to *the* test. And the problem with anything coming out of a UN conference is that there is absolutely no means of enforcement. The member states are not accountable to some higher international authority, even if Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali would prefer it otherwise. They would never agree to such an international authority being invented. So there is only the moral pressure to deliver on their commitments. Some governments feel they are accountable to their own words and signatures; but none is above fudging and mudging and 'opting out' when it suits.

Delegations at international conferences always work strenuously to avoid a form of words in the final communiqué which will oblige them to do anything that their governments weren't already planning to do. Some countries sign even though they have no intention of complying. In the worst cases – particularly in the human-rights field – you wonder if they read the text at all, or merely hope that their signature will open an international chequebook and give their leader a moment of international visibility which will look good back home.

What is needed is something to pack moral punch and push action along at the local level. This is exactly what UNICEF's country offices have supplied in the wake of the World Summit for Children. They have chased – politely, tactfully, expertly – senior government figures and 'helped' them deliver. But UNICEF is unusual. No other UN body has developed this capacity – though arguably that is just what they should have been doing all these many years since the conference circuit began.

So who is going to take forward the agenda for the 1990s which the UN conferences are producing and make sure something happens on the ground? In reality the only force that can make governments implement what they have agreed to is the force of popular disapproval or 'organized shame'. Opposition political parties and other campaigning groups will have to police those agreements. What usually happens is that when some part of an international agreement inspires, matches and supports an issue which is burning at the national level – car emissions, contraceptive freedoms or child support, for example – that policing will be done.

The progress is modest, unspectacular – and the UN is certainly suffering from a crisis of expectations. 'The Earth Summit will be a failure if it does not create conditions for an earth democracy,' proclaimed one campaigner. But how could it ever have done any such thing? Meanwhile, in Zacatecas, Governor Romo has launched his 'social policy in favour of the child' and in Beijing a thousand flowers are about to bloom. The international show must go on. ■

Maggie Black is a freelance journalist who specializes in aid and development.

DRUGS

SUSAN BECKERLEG

No smoke without fire: 'chasing the dragon' is a prelude to the deadly art of injecting.

Bitter brown sugar

Heroin habit spreads in Kenya

TIMA was literally climbing the walls. She had developed a heroin habit and required money to support it. So she scaled house walls, squeezed through the eaves into neighbours' homes and took whatever she could find. She had also turned to prostitution and was scandalizing the local community.

Then she made a brave move. In Watamu, the tourist village where she lived in coastal Kenya, the heroin – 'brown sugar' – which had reduced her to theft and sex work was easily available and offered a continuous source of temptation. So Tima moved to a small fishing village that was largely unaffected by tourism. There she kept off 'brown sugar' by visiting outlying farms and getting drunk on palm wine. There may be better ways of fighting heroin dependency, but with no rehabilitation services in the area Tima was on her own.

'Brown sugar' has been readily available in the coastal tourist towns of Kenya since the mid-1980s. The source of the drug appears to be the Indian subcontinent – supplies arrive by sea, sometimes via Tanzania. The Kenyan 'tourist paradise' towns of Lamu, Malindi and Watamu all have a heroin problem which has almost overwhelmed them.

In Mombasa, Kenya's second city and its major port, the scale of the problem is greater still. Parents do their best to care for their drug-abusing offspring but are powerless to assist them in giving up or controlling their habit. Men and women from the mosques spend hours talking with addicts, trying to persuade them to change their lifestyle.

Most 'brown sugar' users smoke the drug. Injecting has yet to catch on. One young man, Omari, who obtained a discarded syringe from the local health centre and used it to 'shoot up', died within months of making the transition to injecting. It may be only matter of time before the majority switch to syringes. 'Drug tourists', mostly from Italy, are teaching young people in Malindi the deadly art of injecting.

Many users want to stop. A range of approaches has been attempted, but with little or no success. Some have tried adopting the life of a strict Muslim, others have sought the services of traditional healers, or like Tima have substituted alcohol for heroin.

Now heroin users and the wider community in Watamu and Malindi want a rehabilitation service. Inspired by Islamic ideals of mutual support, self-help and discipline, they are investigating the possibility of training volunteers to offer support and advice to heroin users who want to kick their habit. It is hoped that the Omari Project – named to commemorate the first heroin user who died in Watamu – will lead the way. ■

Susan Beckerleg

The state of the American stomach

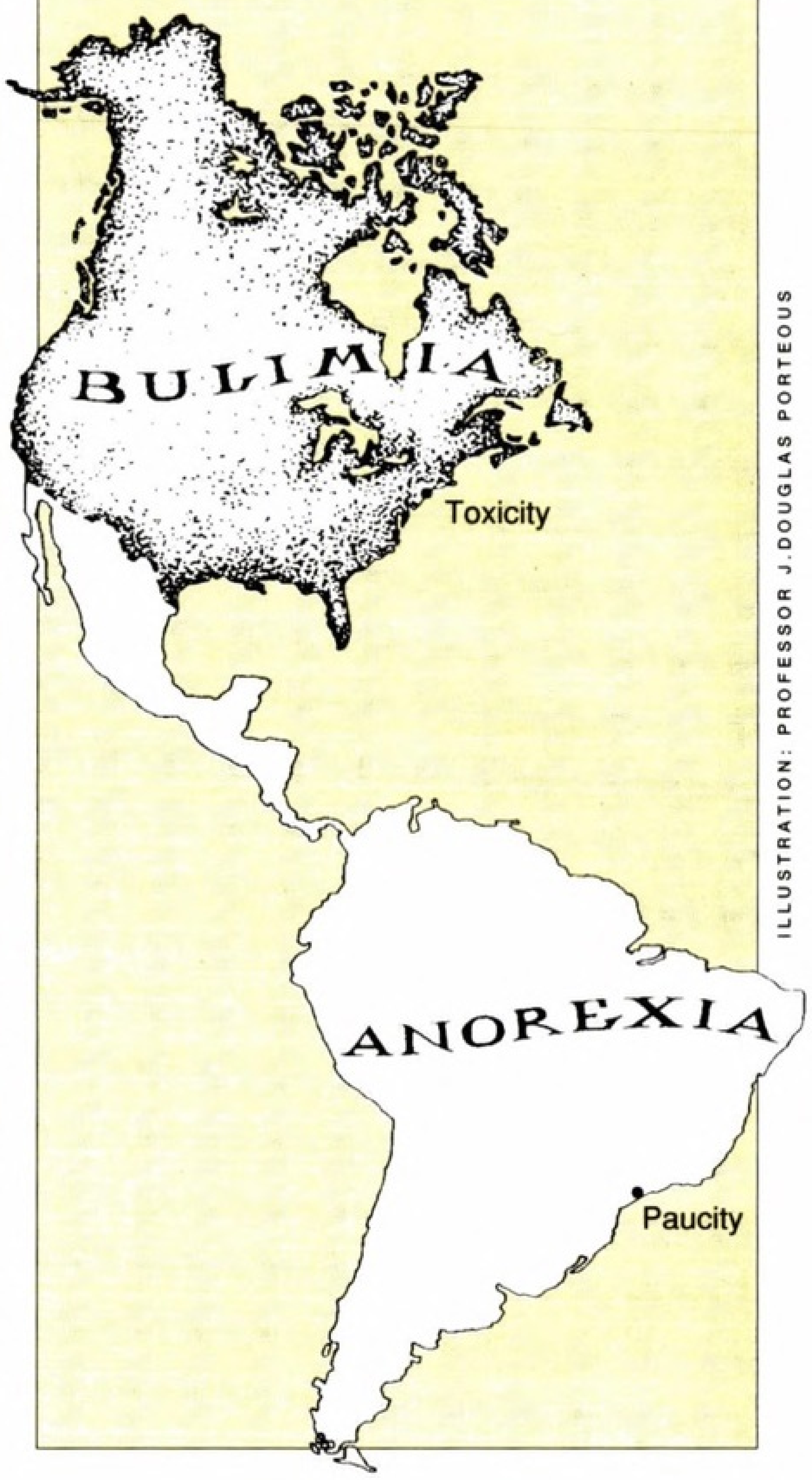


ILLUSTRATION: PROFESSOR J.DOUGLAS PORTEOUS

Falling out

Literacy rates have fallen in 30 out of 39 sub-Saharan African countries. Average spending per pupil in the region declined from $83 per year in 1980 to $76 in 1990. New schools are not being built, while drop-out rates run as high as 45 per cent in Senegal. Enrolment in higher education is 21 students per hundred thousand inhabitants in Tanzania, compared with 5,102 in Canada. 'Structural adjustment' programmes demanded by the IMF and aid donors involving education spending cuts are clearly the major reason for this.

DEXTER TIRANTI / NEW INTERNATIONALIST

UNESCO World Education Report 1994

BOUGAINVILLE

ROSEMARY GILLESPIE

Dirt, rocks and toxic waste from the copper mine have killed the Bougainville forest.

Moonscape mining

Struggle for independence continues

THE smoke rising from the ashes of Moroni village is a grim reminder of the dirty war being fought over the future of one of the world's largest copper mines. A slurry of dirt, rocks and toxic chemicals has turned the once-fertile river valleys into a moonscape. Whole forests have died, their naked branches pointing towards the sky like the fingers of a huge skeleton.

The mine, on the island of Bougainville, is controlled by Rio Tinto Zinc Australia. When Bougainville was part of a United Nations Trust Territory, Australian colonial police clubbed women – the traditional custodians of land on the island – who protested at being removed to make way for the mine. As young people grew up, watching their birthright devastated, they became more militant. In 1988 they began blowing up the power pylons supplying the mine and forced it to close. It has remained closed ever since.

The struggle to close the mine escalated into a war of independence from Papua New Guinea (PNG). The PNG Army was given a licence to 'shoot to kill' but was repelled and left in March 1990, imposing a military blockade on the island. Communications were cut, journalists were kept out and essential supplies such as medicines were prevented from reaching the people.

In May 1990 Bougainville declared independence and established the Bougainville Interim Government. The PNG Army returned, using Australian-supplied mortar bombs, guns, grenades, patrol boats and helicopters to attack towns and villages. Behind the wall of secrecy created by the blockade PNG soldiers were able to torture and massacre civilians. Thousands of civilians, including more than 2,000 children, died from the lack of medicines.

By August 1994 Papua New Guinea was on the verge of bankruptcy. Desperate to retake the mine the PNG Army mounted a three-pronged attack but was repulsed by the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA). A ceasefire was signed in early September 1994 between Papua New Guinea, the Bougainville Interim Government and the BRA.

The people of Bougainville want to decide their own future. Women landowners are determined that the mine will stay closed for the rest of their lives. How long the guns remain silent depends upon how long the peace accord holds. ■

Rosemary Gillespie

Mismatch

According to a recent survey, a quarter of South Koreans would object to their children marrying a foreigner or someone of a different race, while a further 46 per cent would try to talk them out of it. One half of Indonesian parents would give a suitor from the wrong race the boot. By contrast, 95 per cent of Australians claim they would accept a mixed marriage in their family.

Far Eastern Economic Review, vol 157 no 37

Homeless talk

A group of homeless people in Johannesburg, South Africa, has launched *Homeless Talk*, a newspaper that aims to give people sleeping on the streets a voice and to help them earn an income by selling the paper. Similar in conception to *The Big Issue* in the UK and to a growing number of similar publications worldwide, the paper's first print run of 100,000 sold out in three weeks.

Homeless Talk

Electrified

The prospects for the Indian tiger may be even worse than was feared. In Dudhwa National Park, Uttar Pradesh, official figures from Project Tiger say that 93 tigers remain, but locals insist the number is much lower, perhaps as low as 20. A new threat has been added to continued human intrusion, flooding and the depletion of edible undergrowth. Local farmers have taken to using cheap electrified wires to keep animals from their fields and many have been electrocuted.

India Today, 15 September 1994

Illiterate media

A day is being set aside in January to monitor and assess international media coverage of women. The Global Media Monitoring Project will compile information on sexism and stereotyping sent in from organizations and individuals around the world and release it at the UN Conference on Women in Beijing next September. The objective is to improve media 'literacy' on women's issues and to build solidarity between women in different countries.

For more information contact Media Watch, 517 Wellington Street West, Suite 204, Toronto, Canada M5V 1G1

Contravention

Vietnam has asked the United Nations to help protect the rights of ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia. A new immigration law passed by the Phnom Penh Government could lead to the arbitrary expulsion from the country of hundreds of thousands of ethnic Vietnamese who live there. Vietnam claims the new law contravenes international conventions on human rights. In another development, newspaper editor Nuon Chan, an outspoken critic of the Cambodian Government, has been shot dead in Phnom Penh by gunmen on motorbikes. The five-year-old daughter of a UN human-rights official has also been shot in the leg.

Far Eastern Economic Review vol 157 nos 37 and 38

DAVID MUNRO / CENTRAL TELEVISION

FAIR TRADE

New deal

Coffee producers get organized in Peru

'It's trial by fire,' says Luzmila Loayza. She's the young, bright Export Manager for a group of coffee-producing co-operatives in northern Peru.

The trial she's referring to is, however, somewhat unexpected. Some recent problems for her group have come not so much from the past few years, when international coffee prices have sunk to levels not seen since the 1930s, but from their current sharp rise.

Her employer, the Central de Co-operativas Agrícolas Nor Oriente (Cecooag Nor), finds it that much harder now to buy all the coffee it would like from the 4,300 small producers who belong to the group. Local traders offer cash in advance against the commitment from the farmer to sell their crop. This is hard to resist, particularly if producers are impoverished. The sums being offered increase as prices rise but still don't reflect the true market value of the coffee. The profits taken by these traders leave small producers reduced to life at subsistence level.

So it's crucial to the success of Cecooag Nor that the standard of living of its members improves and they become less vulnerable to the hated local traders, the *intermediarios*, who have traditionally offered the only source of credit.

Since Cecooag Nor began dealing with international 'fair trade' organizations in 1991 its central office has developed a fund that pays for doctors, teachers and technical assistants in each of the nine different co-operative unions that make up the group. The central office in Chiclayo also operates a sophisticated grading plant for all its members.

cafédirect
smooth blend • freeze dried
fair trade coffee
in an instant •

MEDIANATURA

'Packshot' with a difference: a fair deal.

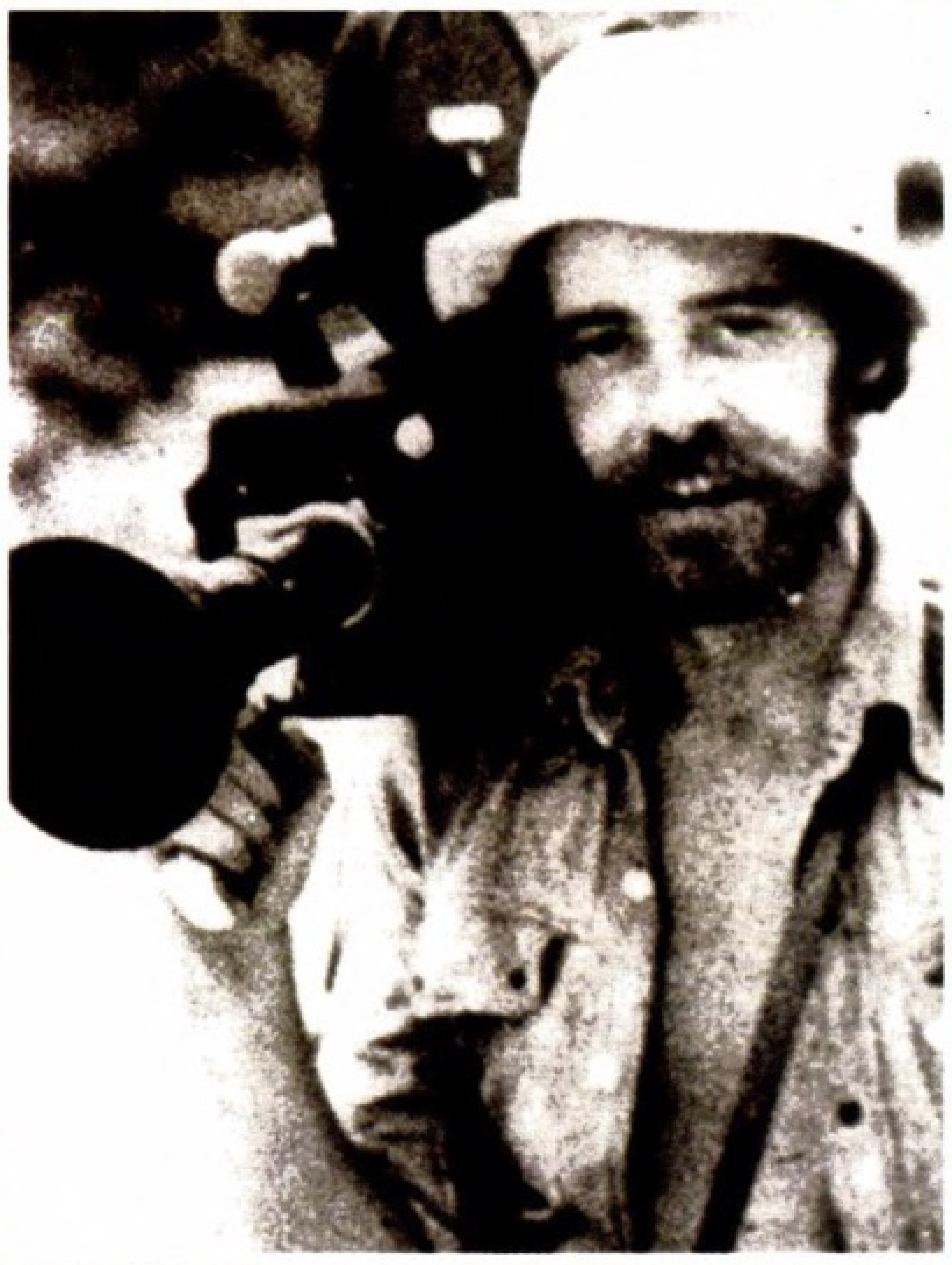
'What we're trying to establish here,' says Luzmila, 'is a fair-trading market that looks to the longer term and follows neither the peaks nor the troughs of coffee prices. These can – and usually do – ruin small producers. We want our producers to be able to escape from a life of mere subsistence. We want to encourage our customers abroad to pay a fairer price for high quality – particularly our organic coffee. That's the deal. The problem with local traders is that they take the money they make away from our community. And when the money leaves, so do the people.'

Luzmila has good reason to know this. Her grandparents once cultivated land in Chiclayo and nearly starved before selling up and fleeing to Lima. Her father returned when Luzmila was four years old. She became a student of foreign trade and eventually, three years ago, the only woman manager in Cecooag Nor. Although she could earn a lot more working for a private company, she's glad to have the chance to learn how her grandparents lived. 'Though it's hard to live on a small wage in Peru I'm quite happy to be neither rich nor living on the streets,' she says.

Now she has travelled to Europe to help launch a freeze-dried ('instant') version of the *Cafédirect* brand. This is sold widely in the UK under the Fairtrade Mark, which when applied to any product assures the consumer that producers are getting a fairer deal. In the one year that *Cafédirect* ground coffee has been available in the UK's major supermarkets it has surpassed expectations and taken 2.85 per cent of the market, according to independent research findings. Two similar companies are doing well in the North American 'gourmet' market and the pioneering Max Havelaar in the Netherlands continues to expand.

Such fair-trade initiatives and the principles behind them are, however, completely absent from international trade negotiations. ■

David Ransom



COURTESY MAUREEN TOLFREE

Brian Peters: murdered by the Indonesian Army.

Deception

Maureen Tolfree thought her brother, Brian Peters, had been killed 'in the crossfire' between rival groups in East Timor in 1975. That is what she was told at the time by the British Foreign Office. Her brother was a member of a crew working for Australian TV that was reporting on intrusions into East Timor prior to the Indonesian invasion later that year.

All of the crew were savagely murdered: all of the evidence clearly pointed to Indonesian complicity. Only as a result of recent publicity about East Timor did Maureen discover she had been deceived. She says that the Foreign Office told journalists not to contact her and deliberately kept her in the dark. She has travelled to New York to present her case to the UN and has asked them to investigate. As for British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, he says: 'It is difficult to see what benefit those directly involved could derive from reopening this issue so long after the event.' Perhaps he should listen more carefully to Maureen Tolfree and enlightenment will follow.

Hugh Dowson

END

END Quote

'If marble can get cancer, you can imagine the plight of children in the area.'

Mahesh Chandra, a New Delhi lawyer who has been fighting a case against pollution from factories and refineries for ten years - it received international publicity only when the Taj Mahal began to turn yellow.

From Mexico: poignant vampires and horror with an emotional heart.

film

Cronos

by **Guillermo del Toro**

Mexican director Guillermo del Toro's debut **Cronos** is a compelling and unusual take on the vampire genre, foregrounding much about attitudes to death in Mexican culture. The film starts – scene lit as yellow as parchment – in the sixteenth century with an alchemist working on a new invention: the Cronos. Resembling a gold scarab, the device is an intricate part-metal, part-organic mechanism that ticks away, granting its user eternal life but also the vampiric thirst for human blood required to sustain it. Centuries later this bizarre collector's item turns up in Mexico City hidden inside an old statue that Jesus Gris, a veteran antique dealer, has just purchased for his shop. Curious about the object, Gris soon finds himself in its terrible grip, but also hounded by a Howard Hughes-like eccentric millionaire who is dying and wants the Cronos for his own purpose.

Light on gore, **Cronos** is a horror film with an emotional heart. A devout Catholic, Jesus Gris is appalled by the accidental pact he has made. The offer of eternal life is like some terrible and painful curse that separates him from those he loves, including his little grandchild Aurora who attempts, like some angel of mercy, to nurse him when he dies only to come back to a terrible flesh-crumbling half-life. Few vampire films could have a scene as poignant as when Aurora puts her grandfather to bed in a makeshift coffin, tucking him up with a blanket and putting her doll in with him for company. A less sensitive director might have played such a scene for laughs. Here del Toro intimates something of the terrible mourning and grief – the process of coming to terms with death that forms the basis of the vampire legend. In this respect it is like an alternative version of the Mexican 'Day of the Dead' festival when the living picnic on the tombs of their deceased relatives. Equally, del Toro suggests the awfulness of Gris' predicament in the brief moment when he contemplates killing Aurora for her blood only to recoil in disgust with himself for the very idea. This is horror indeed. Del Toro gives one of cinema's most rampant myths a necessary transfusion.

Politics ☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆

music

Everyone's Got One

by **Echobelly** *(Fauve FAUV3CD)*

Since the release of their debut album **Everyone's Got One** the acclaim surrounding Echobelly has reached exponential proportions. The young five-piece band's brash, confident pop has the same classic, wordy feel as that of the Smiths. And their line-up is refreshingly multicultural, including Swedish guitarist Gellen Johansson and Debbie Smith, a black gay musician whose brittle textures in her former band Curve have drawn many a sigh of admiration.

But most attention has come to rest on vocalist and lyricist Sonya Aurora Madan. Elfin and photogenic, Echobelly's Indian-born, British-raised leader has become the focus of those with an interest in assessing women's place in the music industry. Madan is, after Sheila Chandra, the most visible Asian woman so far to penetrate the independent music scene's white male bastion. And if her sweet, melodic voice belies her impact, her expressive lyrics do not. Her songs deal with contentious issues in a sparklingly undogmatic way. *Father, Ruler, King, Computer* is about arranged marriages and *Bellyache* was inspired by a friend's reaction to an abortion. Two of the 11-track album's most powerful songs – *Give Her a Gun* and *Call Me Names* – deal specifically with female status and racism.

Audiences have been delighted by the verve with which Madan delivers her forthright opinions. The presence of increasing numbers of Asian girls at Echobelly's concerts testifies to Madan's acceptance as an Anglo-Asian role model. This said, much of Echobelly's album expresses the sheer exhilaration and speed of being young. *Insomniac* is as much about staying out late as it is about self-confidence in the face of confusion; while *Cold Feet, Warm Heart* and *Scream* are wry, modern love songs. It will be interesting to see how Echobelly develop; whether time will mitigate some of their sharper edge. What seems certain is that Madan and her crew will continue to attract plenty of interest.

Politics ☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆

books

A Chorus of Stones

by **Susan Griffin** *(The Women's Press, ISBN 0-7043-4387-8)*

This book was eight years in the making – and you can see why. It is an extraordinary feat which manages to dissolve the artificial boundaries between private and public, inner and outer, past and present, personal psychology and national history.

The descriptive subtitle is *The Private Life of War* and poet-philosopher Griffin starts by backtracking a couple of generations into her own family's history and pulling out a few skeletons from the cupboard. While doing so she conveys the emotional and psychological effect on family members of the sad, destructive habits of secrecy and concealment.

Her idiosyncratic writing style enables her to move swiftly and easily between marine biology, her grand-father's alcoholism, the bombing of Dresden, Himmler's childhood, the paintings of Monet – and to make a coherent point about masculinity, repression and loss.

Griffin has unearthed some fascinating private and public stories. But it's her poetic imagination that gives her instant access to some of the deep connections between areas of experience usually compartmentalized in our culture. This compartmentalizing has made possible the greatest horrors of the twentieth century, from concentration camps to the remote and sanitized 'smart weapons' warfare of recent years.

A Chorus of Stones is relevant because it deals with probably the most potent source of suffering that humankind inflicts upon itself. But more to the point, it reveals how we perpetuate war by hiding and denying its true nature.

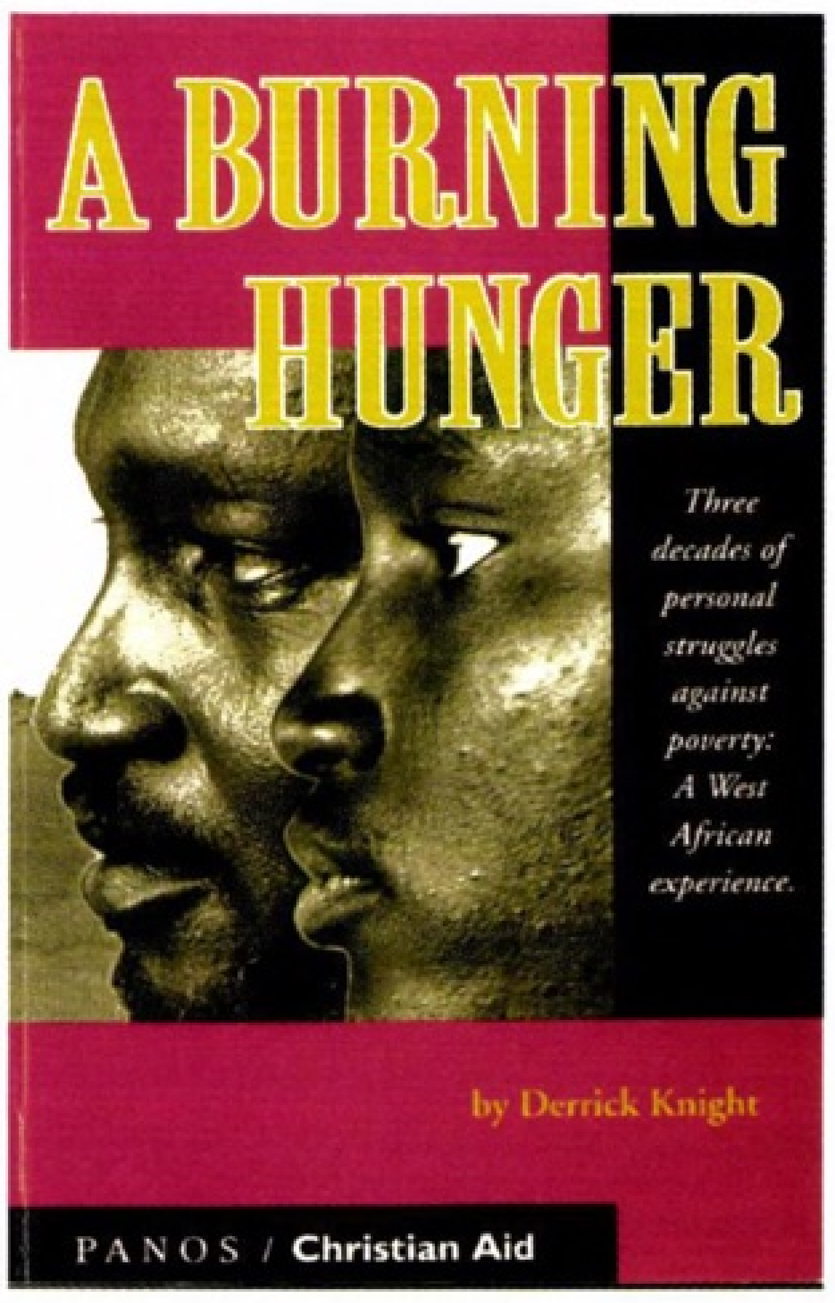
Her narrative seems to fragment towards the end of the book, breaking up into small dazzling particles that read like disjointed diary entries. But perhaps this too makes an ideological point about writing and reading as continuing processes involving flashes of awareness rather than the production and consumption of a definite, finished article.

This is a book that bears reading right through – and dipping back into time and again for its emotional depth, psychological insights and wonderful writing.

Politics ☆☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆

A Burning Hunger

by **Derrick Knight** *(Panos/ Christian Aid ISBN 1-870670-32-9)*


A BURNING HUNGER
Three decades of personal struggles against poverty: A West African experience.
by Derrick Knight
PANOS / Christian Aid

Back in 1965 Knight made a documentary film in Senegal. In this book he retraces his steps and finds out what has happened in the interim to a cross-section of peasant farmers, nomadic herders, health workers, labourers and their environment.

He finds the success of some small village projects is overshadowed by the failure of many large-scale, officially-backed attempts. His conclusion is that in the 1990s the average Senegalese is eating less, earning less and growing less than she was three decades earlier – reflecting the plight of millions of people in sub-Saharan Africa. Knight points the finger of blame at 'the miscalculations and lack of judgement of distant economists and politicians who see development as a formula'. The writing is vivid, the message crucial.

Politics ☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆

STAR RATING	
Excellent	☆☆☆☆☆
Very good	☆☆☆☆
Good	☆☆☆
Fair	☆☆
Poor	☆

Reviews editor: **Vanessa Baird**

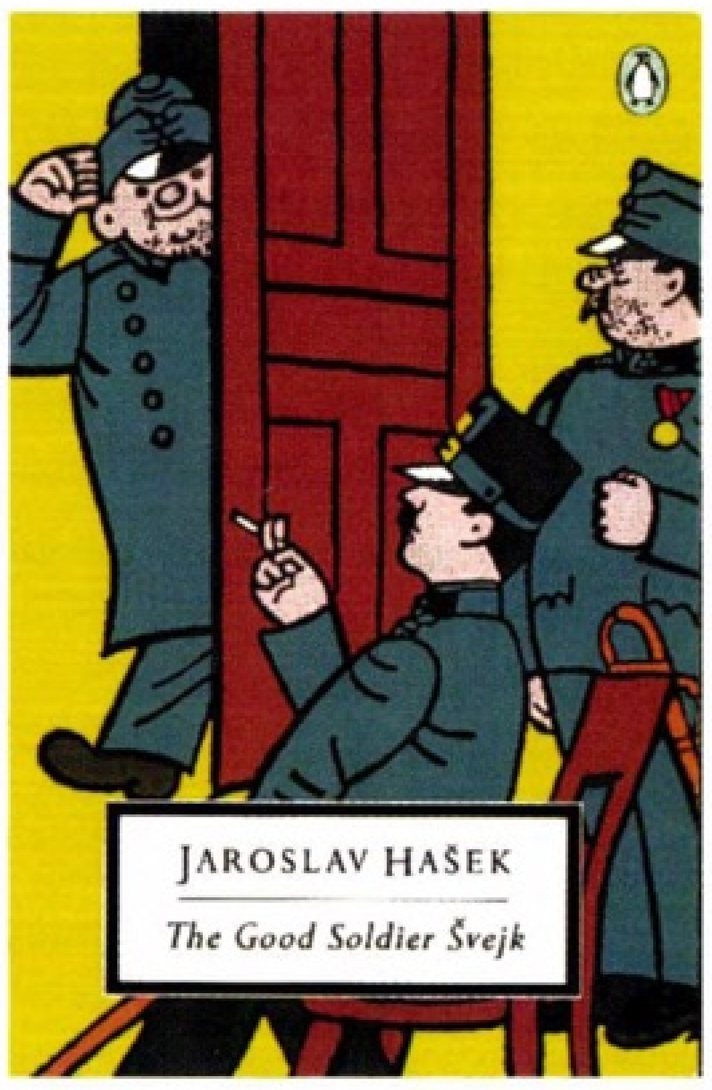
THE classic

The Good Soldier Svejk

...being the book that teaches us who makes history.

THE GOOD SOLDIER SVEJK (pronounced 'Shvake') is a comic odyssey for which its author, Jaroslav Hasek, had difficulty finding a publisher. Indeed, he financed the printing and distribution of the first volume himself in 1921. At first glance the novel seems to have weaknesses which offer an elementary explanation of his problems. This is one of those books in which one damn thing just seems to happen after another without any of the narrative logic or shaping we usually demand of fiction.

The story is that of Svejk, a citizen of Prague, told from the moment he is press-ganged into service in the Austro-Hungarian Army on the eve of the First World War. It documents his ludicrously delayed arrival at the Eastern Front and eventual 'capture' by his own side. There is a strong element of slapstick and a great deal of silliness. Moreover, the hero is not depicted as having any internal life. His main characteristics are a tendency to misinterpret orders, or to interpret them too literally; to abase himself to a degree which infuriates even his superior officers; to appear guileless, doing everything with a famously blank expression of equanimity; and to recount hugely digressive anecdotes at every turn (various counts have concluded that he tells between 180 and 200 such stories in the course of the novel). Hasek unfortunately died – of tuberculosis contracted during the war – before finishing the work. These combined features give a first impression of a humorous but uncrafted work, certainly not of a major artistic production.



'Great times call for great men,' Hasek explains in a brief, ironic preface, but goes on to state that 'the great' are the reverse of those who act with the precise intention of having their names in the history books. He describes his hero Svejk as 'heroic and valiant'. But Svejk performs no actions which those two words are typically used to describe. It becomes clear that Hasek, by means of his enigmatic hero, is attempting to redefine certain key values. Svejk comes to be seen as a 'good soldier' in political rather than military terms because his stubborn incompetence has the effect of destabilizing and exposing the absurdities of imperial rule. The implication is that the form of political disruption adopted by people like Svejk – complete resistance which takes the form of utter compliance – has been instrumental in the post-war liberation of the Czechoslovak people after four centuries of imperial domination.

There is a curious contradiction, then, between the imputed historical importance of Svejk's actions and the seeming imbecility of those actions themselves. The problem is resolved if we remind ourselves that Svejk is not a conscious political actor. The historical effect of his actions has nothing to do with a wish on his part to be historically effective. Svejk's main motive is personal survival. But the wish to stay alive is by definition counter to the army's need for willing cannon fodder. Svejk is thus a thoroughly destructive spanner in the works. Nothing proceeds smoothly when he is present. Even the story, of which he is the hero, cannot progress because he keeps dragging it down the cul-de-sacs of his interminable anecdotes.

This last observation suggests that there might be a connection between the apparent artlessness of Hasek's novel and that of its hero. If individuals can be historically monumental without trying to be so, a novel can be great without showily displaying the torture marks of agonized literary creativity. Indeed, Hasek's work effectively explodes conventional notions of what a 'great novel' is. Svejk's unstoppable storytelling not only trips up and shoves aside the advancing narrative but injects a regular dose of oral culture into its literary world – and allows us glimpses into the lives of the 'ordinary' people whom it often seems to be the mission of 'great' literature to ignore. Indeed, the novel even contains a memorable minor character, Marek, who seems to unify the literary and oral concerns of its author by writing an imaginary future history of Svejk's company, the chapters of which he reads aloud to his comrades.

The critic JP Stern has called **The Good Soldier Svejk** 'the only genuine popular creation of modern European literature; popular in the sense of immediately appealing to unliterary and relatively unsophisticated readers; popular in the sense of being modelled on them; and popular in the sense of being the product of an unliterary, naive creative imagination'. Svejk's immediate grip on the imagination of the new Czechoslovak Republic was revealed by a number of plays of the 1920s which stole the character and transplanted him to often bizarre new situations: *Svejk Has Twins*, *Svejk as a Football Player*, even *Svejk on Mars*! But Svejk endures transplantation across time as well as across space. In a Europe in which a major empire has so recently dissolved under the impetus of popular discontent, Hasek's hero speaks to us of the value and importance of being ordinary. He teaches us that those who make history are usually not aiming to make history. ■

Macdonald Daly

***The Good Soldier Svejk and His Fortunes in the World War** by **Jaroslav Hasek** (various editions in print including one published by Penguin, translated by Cecil Parrott).*

Q? QUESTIONS

...that have always intrigued you about the world will appear in this, your section, and be answered by other readers. Please address your answers and questions to 'Curiosities'.

Six million is the figure commonly given for the number of people killed in the Nazi Holocaust. Has anyone got a more precise figure?

● I do not know about a precise figure, but six million is nowhere near the mark. Six million usually refers to the number of Jews murdered by the Nazis. An estimated six million *more* people who were not Jews but who also did not fit into Nazi society were killed. They included communists, socialists, liberals, homosexuals, Romanies and disabled people.

How many were victims of Hitler's Final Solution?

For some reason this other six million have been forgotten by the world – and it is important that they should not be. With the spectre of Nazism haunting Europe again it would be wise to remember the words of Pastor Niemoller, a victim of the Nazis:

First they came for the Jews
and I did not speak out –
because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for the communists
and I did not speak out –
because I was not a communist.
Next they came for the trade unionists
and I did not speak out –
because I was not a trade unionist.
Then they came for me
and there was no one left
to speak out for me.

John Watson
Leeds, UK

Which country has been under colonial rule for the longest time?

● I would like to think it is the state of Goa on the West coast of India, which saw Portuguese colonial rule from November 1510 right up until 1961. The people here have had to pay the price of artificially-created religious animosity, cultural alienation and loss of their mother tongues – partly a legacy of one of the worst Catholic Inquisitions in the world outside Spain.

Frederick Noronha
Goa, India

● As the English first became involved in 1169 – with the arrival of the Norman knight Strongbow – and British soldiers are still on the streets of Belfast, Ireland must be a leading contender.

Eamonn O'Tierney
London, UK

● This question cannot be answered as many countries are still under colonial rule. Some, like Ulster, are under direct rule. Others, like Malawi, were given nominal independence 30 or more years ago. But rule is maintained by bribery, intimidation and blackmail. The methods of rule have changed, but the rule remains the same.

Mtumiki Njira
Limbe, Malawi

AWAITING YOUR ANSWERS

What is the origin of the expression ' a different kettle of fish'. Does it, as it would appear, have psychedelic origins?

Hugh Jamieson
Port Glasgow, UK

How come gases which are normally considered heavier than air – such as chlorine, carbon monoxide and dioxide – are reaching the upper layers of our atmosphere? I understand that if they are heated before emission they may rise until the temperature is equalized. But surely then they would fall back down again?

PJ Crawley
Basingstoke, UK

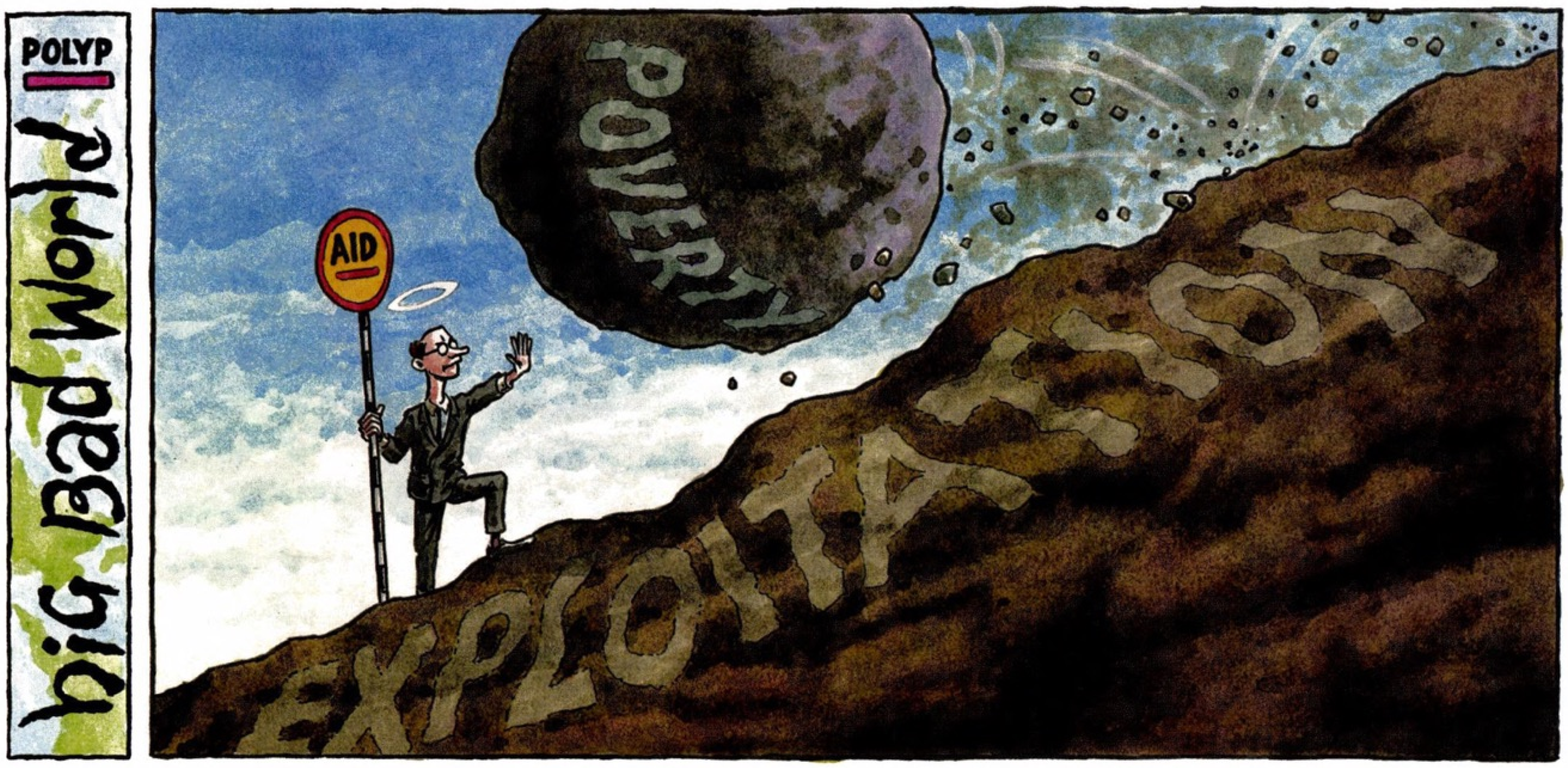
The massive amounts of waste oil released into the sea from tankers cleaning their holds is said to be mainly due to port restrictions and lack of amenities. Is this true?

C Davison
Billingham, UK

If 'crack' cocaine is more potent than cocaine powder why is it cheaper?

Duncan Wood
Weeting, UK

If you have any questions or answers please send them to Curiosities, **New Internationalist, 55 Rectory Road, Oxford OX4 1BW, UK,** or to your local **NI** office (see inside front cover for addresses).



Scotch on the Rocks

Or from Highlands to low life – ***Alison Napier*** *was near the end of the journey.*

BRIAN lived in the Highlands, in a cottage, near a village – a popular village with big, old houses turned into big, old hotels. Tourists came and stayed in the village that became a town. They watched the Highland Games and bought souvenir programmes, and back in the hotel with oak staircases and red carpets and antlers on every wall they drank tea and ate shortbread.

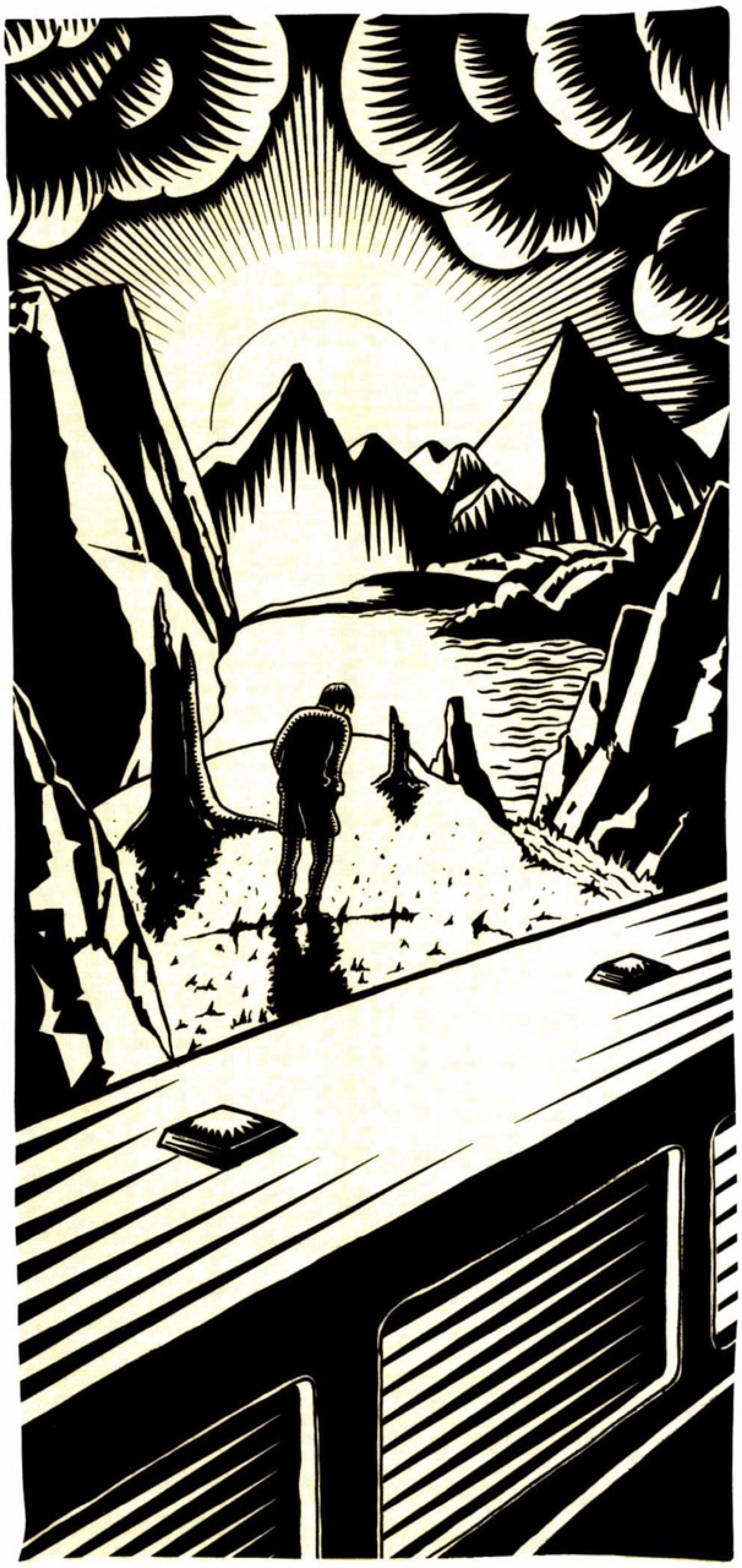


ILLUSTRATION: JIM TURNER

Before lunch there'd be a guided walk through a gate, *Hotel Patrons Only*, down a path by a stream, ice-cold like Cola, brown and frothy. They'd creep and stumble and gingerly step over rocks and puddles. Wet ferns and bracken slapped their legs, the midges were out, so thank God we could turn back for lunch, for Scotch broth and venison roast. At night a performance, a concert, a *ceilidh*, a great deal of whisky, a great deal of whisky. And a traditional English breakfast next morning.

This is where Brian lived – a wee boy in long grey shorts and a shirt and a pullover and a cap, scrambling along tracks, over boulders, up trees, up hills, hiding near the railway line to watch the trains, only three a day mind you, and fewer now. His father worked the signals at the station in the village, and he drank a lot and hit his wife and sons, but couldn't remember after, and his mother kept her head down and gritted her teeth and bore children as her mother had done before her. An ordinary family. Brian went to school and did his lessons, an ordinary boy who hummed and whistled and swished the tops off the bracken with a stick.

Twenty years later, wife and kids and job and house behind him, Brian was living in London, a hostel full of big old staircases and hundreds of beds. *Residents Only*. A Victorian workhouse in fact, for the derelicts, the dossers, the winos, the losers, the drunks, the scroungers, the beggars, the wasters, the outcasts, the scum, and there are only two rules you know, no alcohol and no fighting on the premises and it's your choice.

Oh God, it's Brian again – lurching up to the office hatch with narrow red eyes and thick speech we cannot translate, not even I, and we share a common tongue. 'Go to bed, Brian,' we say with one voice, scarcely glancing up from the Situations Vacant pages in the newspaper. Just go to bed. 'Bed' is a six-feet-by-two-feet bench with a thin stained mattress, a sheet and a blanket, in a cubicle eight feet by four feet that smells of disinfectant and urine, with hardboard walls that do not reach the ceiling and a door that does not lock. Please. Go to bed.

He has bumped into the cigarette machine and is kicking it. Perhaps it will work now, it's been jammed for days. He is rubbing his eyes with the backs of his hands, sobbing and crying and swearing and running crazily to the Gents where he locks himself in, the only private space there is. Brian, I call. Brian. 'Leave me alane. Leave me alane the lo' o' yiz.' The crying stops. I hear the sound of vomiting. Then crying again, quieter. I tiptoe away.

Another night, at half past two, we hear this god-awful singing in the street, loud and tuneless, 'Oh flower o' Scotland, when wull we see yer like again, who fought an' died fur yer wee bit hill an' glen, an' stood against them...', verse after tuneless verse, what a performance; I can hear people opening windows, people shouting, the phone rings and it is someone in the posh flats opposite: 'Shut him up or I'll call the police'. The sound of breaking glass. From their balconies they are throwing down milk bottles at him, oh if only they had thrown flowers, oh Brian why are you always drunk, on cider and extra-strong lager and a great deal of whisky, a great deal of whisky.

His friend Fred says that Brian can't remember singing or being dragged inside, so don't mention it, he'll be awful embarrassed.

I move on, get a better job, a nicer room in a smaller city. The hostel is closed and may be sold, prime office space in Central London. Some who lived there are homeless and some who worked there are jobless, and I hear about George and Jimmy and John from Australia and oh yes that drunk Brian, he jumped under an Inter-City 125 train. The London to Edinburgh 125. The London to Edinburgh 125. The London to Edinburgh 125.

So I drank a great deal of whisky, a great deal of whisky, and wandered away and hid by the railway line to watch the trains, heading north. ■

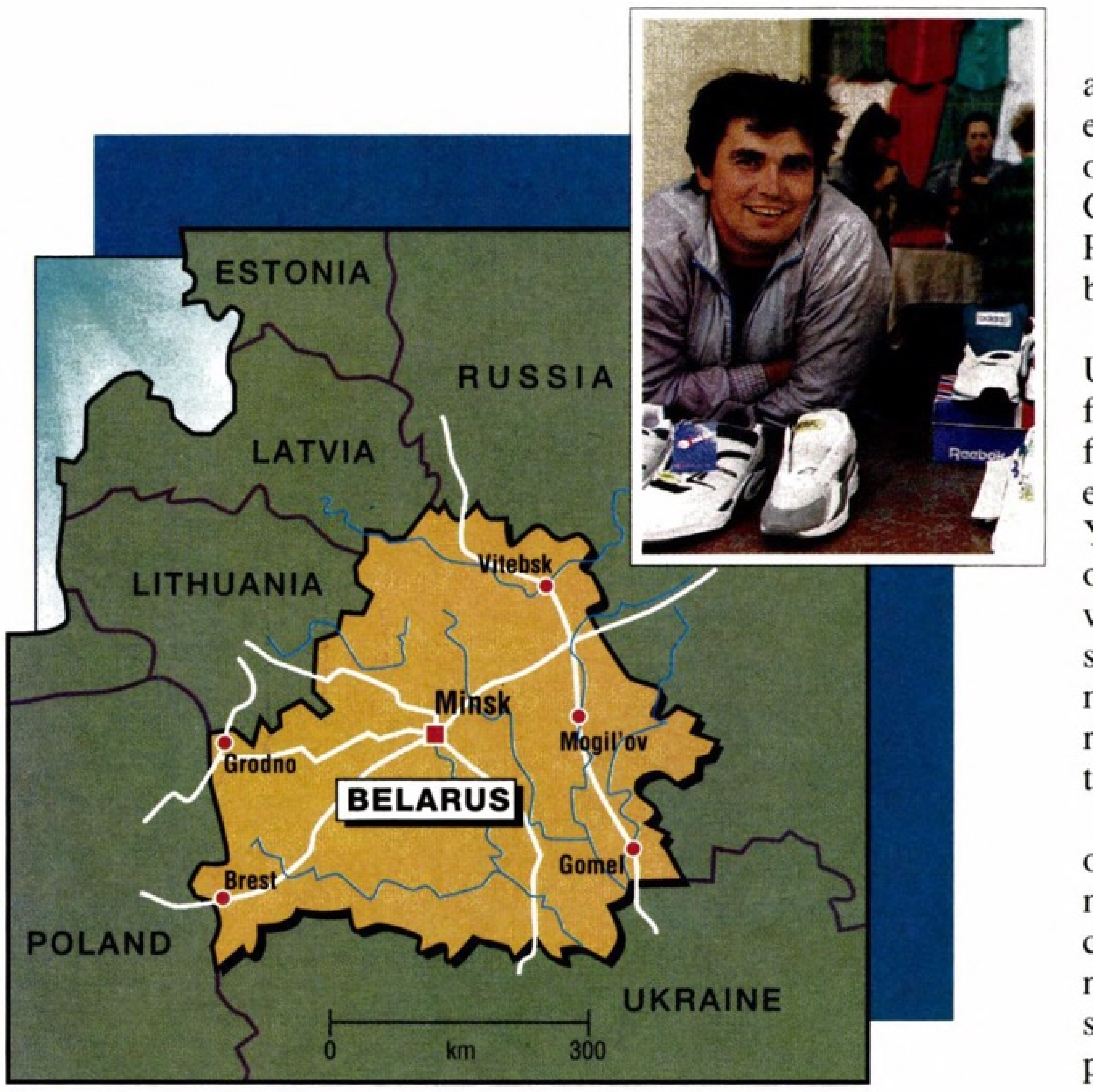
Alison Napier *has gone back to Scotland to write full-time, poverty permitting.*

Belarus

FLAT and forested, with many lakes and swamps, Belarus lies between Poland and Russia and is fringed by Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine. It is a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) which is made up of 11 states of the former Soviet Union (USSR). Its capital, Minsk, is capital of the CIS.

In the fourteenth century its language, Belarusian, was the only written Russian language. Since independence from the USSR in 1991 Belarusian has replaced Russian as the official language, used on television and radio, and there are plans to make it the language of teaching in schools.

The country's economy is under tremendous strain. Nearly a quarter of the state budget is spent on mitigating the fall-out from the 1986 Chernobyl disaster at the nuclear power plant a few kilometres over the border in Ukraine. Laws designed to help the one in five Belarusians who live in a contaminated area have been passed, taking damaged agricultural land out of use and providing preferential taxation and other benefits for local people. In large areas forestry will be impossible for many decades, removing a much needed source of revenue.



TOBY LATTA

Formerly, Belarus assembled goods made of components from all over the Soviet Union as part of the strategy cementing the Soviets. The disintegration of the USSR signalled the end of the practice, causing severe difficulties for Belarus, which must seek new suppliers and markets for its finished goods. A natural step would be to turn west and trade with Poland, but with no reserves of convertible currency to buy resources and supplies abroad, Belarus has nothing to offer this potential partner. Instead individual Belarusians buy up goods for resale at home. High demand and little effective consumer protection means that many imports are poor in quality.

Attitudes to the recent past are ambivalent: half an exhibition preserving the decor of rooms where the first Congress of the future Bolshevik Party was held in 1899 has now been dismantled.

In 1922 Belarus joined the USSR as one of its official founders, but in 1941 it was the first of the Soviet republics to experience Hitler's aggression. You will meet very few women or men there born in 1924: they were the generation leaving school as the German troops marched in. Belarus's heroic resistance cost the lives of over two million of its people.

Until 1994 Belarus was the only CIS republic to be a parliamentary not presidential democracy. Like Yeltsin in Russia, the newly elected President Aleksander Lukashenko has gained popularity for his zealous drive against corruption. Despite a revivalist stance on the country's cultural roots the Government's approach has been marked by economic pragmatism. Unlike many former Communist countries it has renamed only one street in the capital, thus saving the expense of changing official maps and letter-heads. ■

Liz Guyatt

AT A glance

Excellent	★★★★★
Good	★★★★
Fair	★★★
Poor	★★
Appalling	★

POLITICS

LEFT RIGHT

Official commitment to market economy but little enacted.

INCOME DISTRIBUTION ★★

Some deterioration after collapse of USSR.

LITERACY ★★★★★

Universal education.

SELF-RELIANCE ★★

Petroleum reserves in south. Few other mineral resources.

FREEDOM ★★★★

Lukashenko elected President in July 94 despite TV campaigns favouring Prime Minister Kebich.

POSITION OF WOMEN ★★★

Legacy of some equality.

LIFE EXPECTANCY ★★★★

71 years.

(US 76 years)

Leader President Aleksander Lukashenko.

Economy GNP per capita US$ 3,110 *(US$22,240)*.
Monetary unit: Belarusian Rouble.
Main imports: Components and raw materials for producing technical goods.
Main exports: Agricultural and electrical equipment. Chemical and petrochemical products.

People 10.3 million

Health Infant mortality 20 per 1,000 live births *(US 9 per 1,000)*. Many people, especially children, are suffering from the effects of the Chernobyl disaster. It is possible that the real extent of the disaster is only now manifesting itself because of the delay between radioactive contamination and the onset of disease. Severe shortage of medicines and medical equipment.

Culture Belarusians (77.9%); Russians (13.2%); Poles; Ukrainians; Jews.
Religion: Christian Orthodox; in the western part Catholic.
Languages: Belarusian (official); Russian (spoken as second language by most of population); Polish.

Sources: *Third World Guide 1993-4; State of the World's Children 1994; Human Development Report 1994; The Times' Peoples of Europe (1994); Svaboda 19 June 1994; The Chernobyl Trace in Belarus, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus (1992).*

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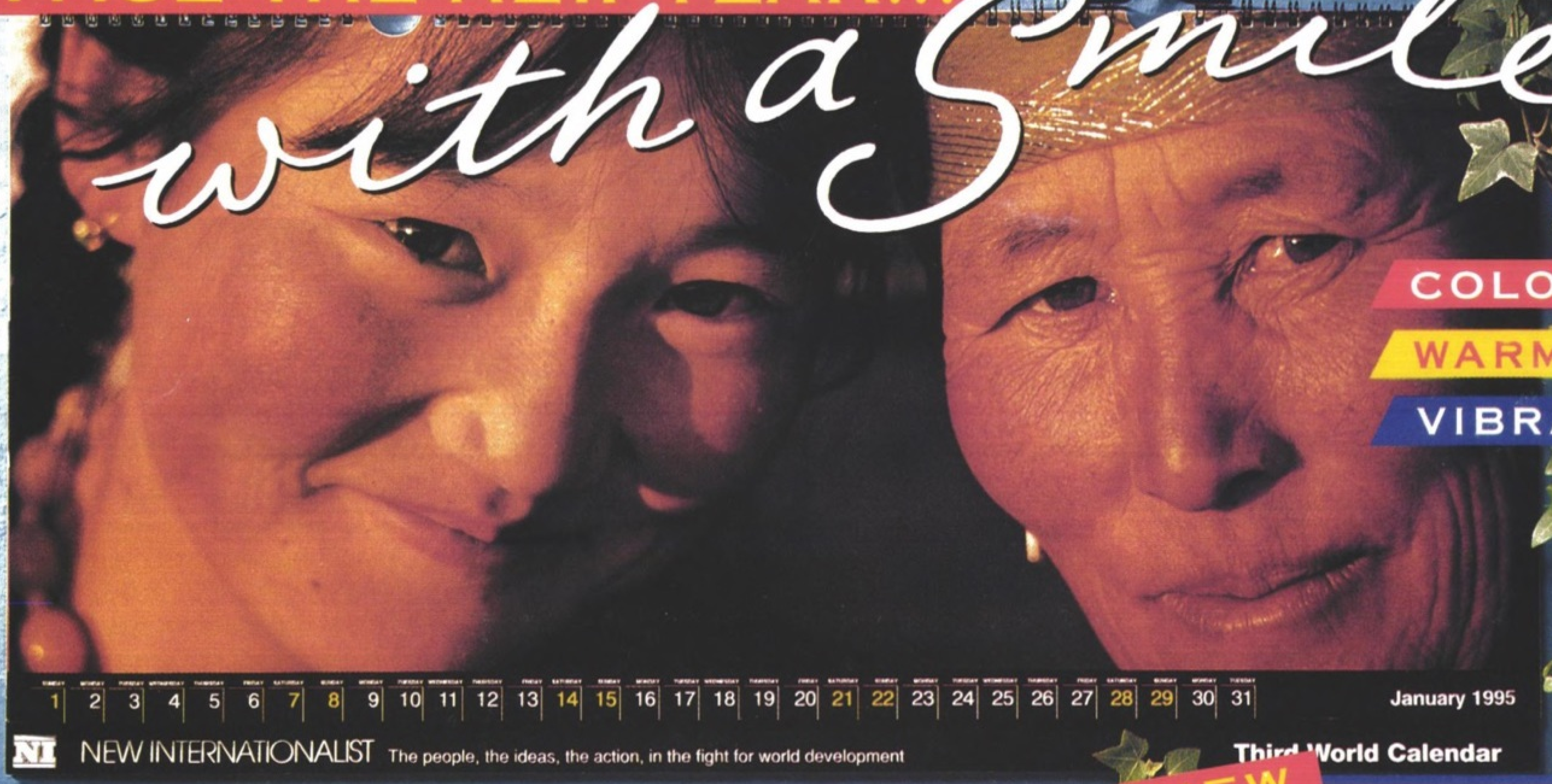

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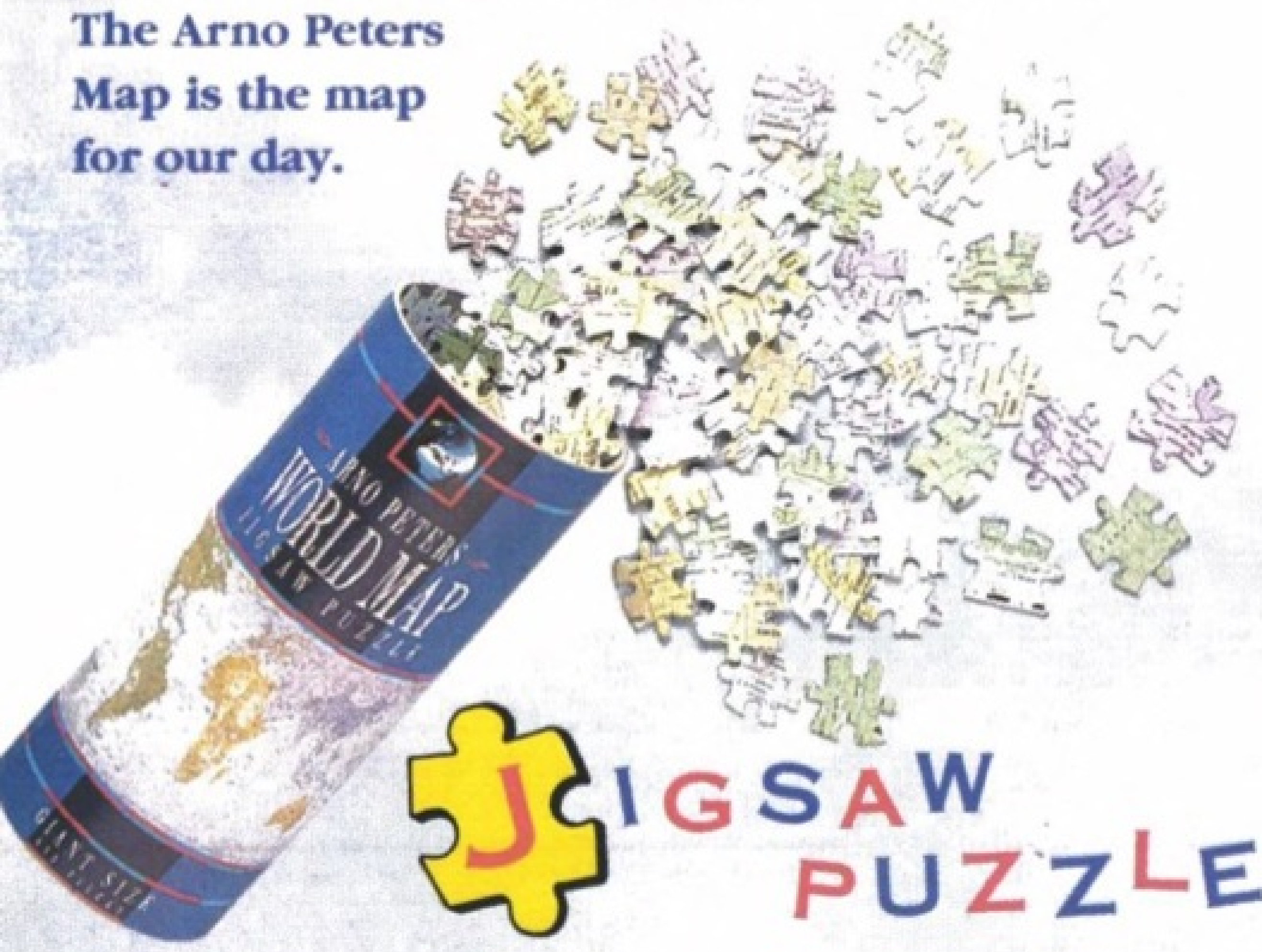

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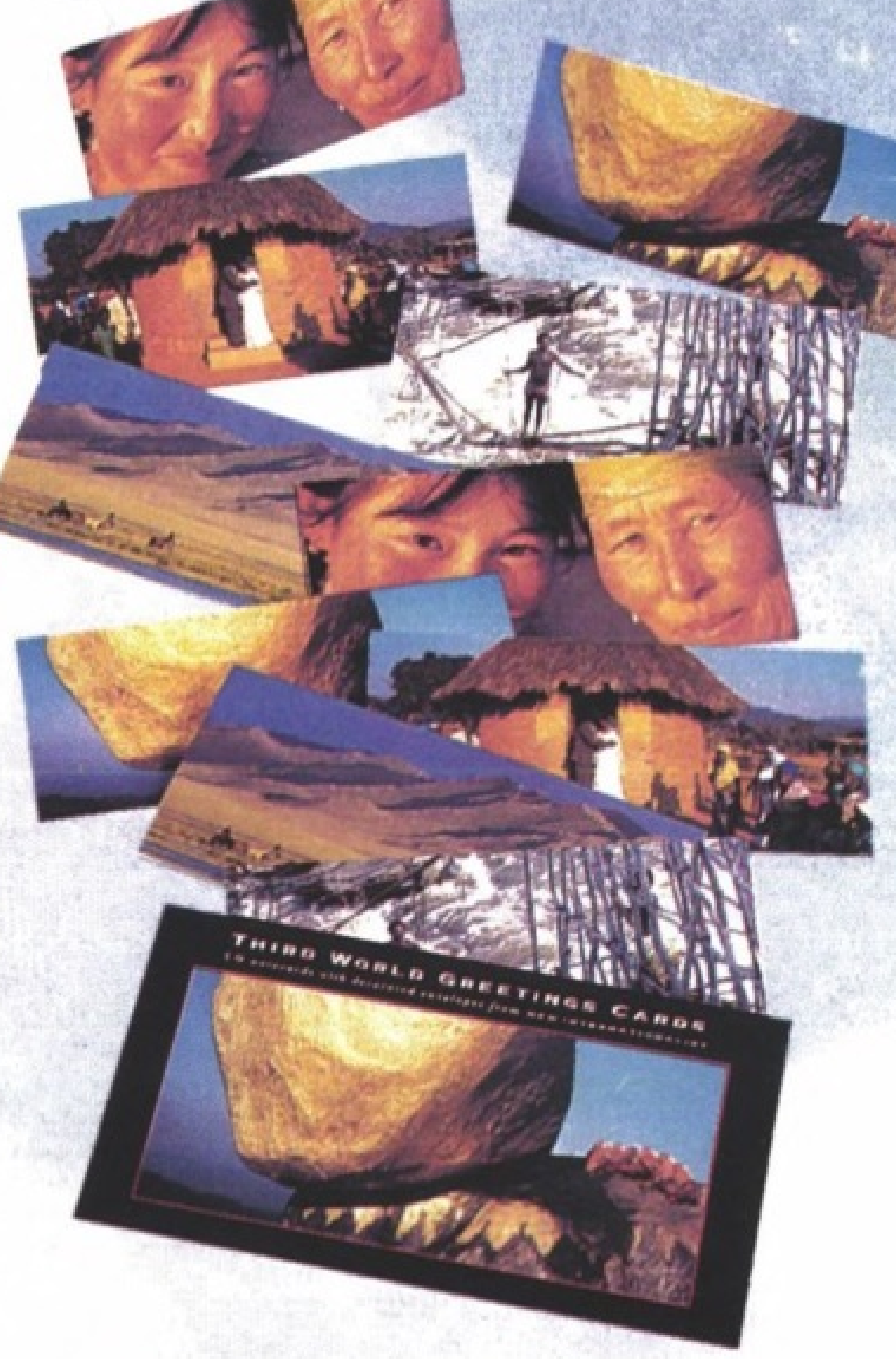

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